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Issue August/September 2020



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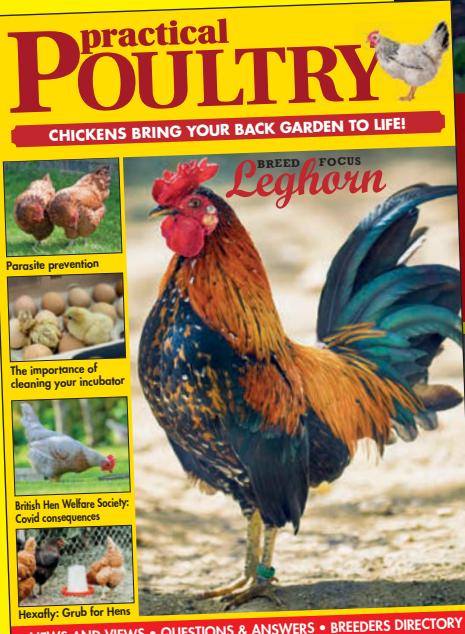
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Welcome

There has no doubt been enough written and broadcast about Covid 19 without me adding to it. Personally I am both grateful and guilty, grateful because I have a smallholding, have managed to get animal food pretty easily due to our amazing local feed merchant and as a bonus, all the animals have been well throughout the lock down period. Guilty because I am still anxious and now feeling the restrictions of the future. It is a very difficult time for us all. I would never class myself as a sociable person but it seems I am a bit more sociable than I had thought. There is, I have discovered, a wealth of difference between choosing not to see people and not being able to.

On my smallholding

Naturally the garden is more organised than usual and along with many smallholders I am expecting huge amounts of courgettes, beans, cucumbers and tomatoes to name a few. I'm also expecting some ducklings as two ducks broke away from the main flock and are in a very safe place but exactly where in that barn I cannot tell. I had hoped my peacocks would sit but despite producing eggs, unlike last year they have declined to sit so they have gone in a friend's incubator. Mine was hatching white pheasants really well until we had a power cut and only two hatched, both weak but one did not survive. Panic! Had to locate some day olds and rapidly purchase a couple as friends so now I have Peking again. They were the only breed that didn't dwarf the pheasant so no real choice there!

Haymaking

As usual we are nervously preparing for the haymaking ahead. As we get older so does the pain of doing this increase – and the tiredness! We never start until mid July so the nesting birds have usually raised their broods though we do look for them as well. Then choosing a spell of hot weather without thunderstorms is the key feature for success but the weather forecast often seems only accurate for the

next day. With a number of ponies and donkeys we do really depend on the hay crop so it is a very worrying time for us both as I am sure it is for everyone. And in between that the inevitable ragwort, was there ever such a persistent weed? Who says summer is restful? I have a shaming secret in that I hate the very long evenings and secretly wish it could be dark by 9pm or a bit earlier so I can sit down and have a rest. If its light then we seem to be working outside. But I equally hate the darkness at 4pm, thankfully some months off.

News to Watch

There is much concern from people not always on the same side about the possible trade deal with the USA where it is feared we might be forced to take imports that don't meet our standards of animal welfare. There is room for improvement on many of our farm animal welfare standards but we do tend to try and keep all produce clean throughout the process whereas the USA clean up at the end, hence the chlorinated chicken. The loser in all of this is animal welfare. One of the main reason for becoming a smallholder is to be able to ensure higher standards than required of animal welfare with free range animals that have individual attention, a far cry from the feed lots of the USA. The NFU have a petition for food to continue to be produced to the world leading standards even in the toughest global circumstances I'm not sure when it closes but worth a look. Not sure how much influence this will have but its better than doing nothing. And of course tell your MP your views. We cannot lose our standards and penalise those producing higher welfare animal products.

Thinking of you all, have a peaceful summer and stay safe *Liz Wright*

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Photo: Alan Wheeldon

Texel Ewe Lamb shines in VIRTUAL Sheep Show!

The third Online Sheep Show took place on the 23rd May. Entries hit over 1,800 entered in 67 classes and judged by 15 judges, from across the country. Competition was fierce across the classes with some breeds such as Texels having more than 150 entries. Exhibitors competed for a range of prizes donated by the shows' sponsors. These included £150 in cash prizes from Greenlands Insurance, a painting from Steph Burch, ear tags from Allflex, Animac sheep show rugs and shearing course vouchers donated by British Wool.

The 1800 entries culminated in two winning entries. Taking top honours from judge Roland Williams, Owestry, was a Texel ewe lamb from Ben Vernon, Staffordshire. She is by Auldhouseburn Cadbury, out of a homebred gimmer sired by Garngour Alabama. In Reserve Interbreed stood a Hampshire Down ewe from Andrew Goldie, Hoddam flock, Dumfries and Galloway, the ewe was bred by the Galbraith flock and was bought at the Carlisle sale.

Judge R Williams commented "The picture of the Texel ewe lamb was so impressive showing an animal with tremendous stature and style. The picture of the Hampshire Down ewe provided an excellent front, topline and style. Many congratulations to the breeders and photographers!"

Interbreed champion Ben Vernon said "I thought the online sheep show



was a very well put together and organised way of showcasing our sheep under the current climate we are all experiencing due to Covid 19, it was easy to enter and I'm over the moon to have won interbreed. A special mention must go to all the organisers and sponsors for making it happen."

The concept for the online show was



The Online Sheep Show Interbreed champion Texel ewe lamb Ben Vernon **Right:** Reserve Interbreed Hampshire Down Andrew Goldie

THE ONLINE SHEEP SHOW

SUPREME INTERBREED CHAMPION & RESERVE

INTERBREED CHAMPION



TEXEL EWE LAMB - BEN VERNON
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PAINTING BY STEPH BURCH

RESERVE INTERBREED



HAMPSHIRE DOWN EWE - ANDREW GOLDIE
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from Stu Gamble, Shropshire "The Show Season is such an important part of the farming community year, showcasing agriculture and rural life. Shows provide opportunity to showcase your stock and most importantly socialise after a long winter. The shows are irreplaceable, but this goes a little way to replicate the vital role they play in the agricultural community."

The show can be viewed by following this link (<https://www.facebook.com/TheOnlineSheepShow/>) **TS**



Small abattoirs have a big part to play in animal welfare says the HSA

A new report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) on small abattoirs published this week highlights the decline of licensed abattoirs in the UK since the 1930s and the subsequent impact on animal welfare. The HSA was one of the stakeholders taking part in the APGAW inquiry, providing valuable input and independent advice on animal welfare matters within its remit, which is reflected in the report.

The report shows how the number of licensed abattoirs in the UK has declined over the years, from 30,000 registered in the 1930s to just under 250 today. The loss of smaller, local abattoirs has meant that livestock may be required to travel longer distances within the UK and, in some cases by sea also, both within and beyond the UK.

Reduction of travel time

One of the Government's animal welfare objectives is to reduce travel time from point of production to slaughter. This objective requires there to be an adequate number of well-distributed abattoirs in livestock rearing areas and consideration is given to the throughput of these abattoirs to ensure they can provide the service to meet the objective. This objective is shared by farmers – the report outlines that throughout the evidence received, farmers felt very strongly that they wanted to keep journeys to slaughter as short as possible, not just because of concern for the welfare of their animals, but because they also felt longer journeys led to poor meat quality.

Farmers expanded on their concerns for animal welfare and described time in lairage as a major driver for their response, specifying the mixing of their

animals with larger groups of unfamiliar animals. Their evidence stated that processing of the animal is usually faster at smaller abattoirs, where there are fewer other animals waiting, and they may be able to accompany their animals to the point of slaughter, if desired. A farmer from Orkney stated: "Small abattoirs give small lots of native breeds experienced, relaxed handling, giving the animals the time they need to feel confident to move calmly to the stunning area." The report noted how smaller abattoirs may also help to reduce illegal slaughter, facilitate emergency slaughter, provide slaughter for wider species and benefit the welfare of animals born and reared on a single farm by avoiding mixing of unfamiliar animals.

Recognize the contribution of smaller abattoirs

Technical Director at the HSA Charlie Mason said: "The HSA was pleased to contribute towards this report, giving both verbal and written evidence to the group. A network of smaller abattoirs would not only reduce the length of journeys undertaken by livestock, in both distance and duration, but contribute significantly to the provenance and integrity of locally-produced meat. Timely emergency and casualty slaughter is also an important animal welfare provision which may be more easily met by smaller abattoirs."

The report makes a number of recommendations, including providing slaughter options that enable shorter journey times from point of rearing to point of slaughter, recognition of small abattoirs' contributions to animal welfare and environmental benefits and that public bodies, in particular economic partnerships or forums, see



small abattoirs as essential infrastructure supporting the rural economy. It also recommended giving consideration as to how small abattoirs could be supported to access training and development of skills that enable them to have Animal Welfare Officers and offer a wider range of services, such as equine slaughter.

The report concluded: "During this piece of work, members of the inquiry were impressed by the engagement of stakeholders and the commitment to raise awareness of the decline in abattoirs. It is hoped that this report helps in some way to bring Government together with the stakeholders to support small abattoirs firstly with access to the capital needed to modernise and then to facilitate the development of business models that enable their sustainability."

The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) is an independent charity recognised internationally for promoting scientific, technical and educational advances towards improving the welfare of food animals worldwide at slaughter, killing, marketing and transport.

Its work includes researching, refining and demonstrating humane slaughter methods, publishing material such as guidelines, best practice, books and videos, funding research projects and the development of equipment. Specialist technical staff provide expert and practical advice on all welfare issues relating to food animals.

The HSA is funded by voluntary donations, subscriptions and legacies.

APGAW

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) is an all-party group made up of MPs, Peers and associate animal welfare organisations or groups with a specific interest in this area. The aim of the Group is to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe. APGAW seeks to influence the development and introduction of effective wide-ranging legislation to improve welfare and also acts as a discussion forum of politicians and welfare experts to look at areas of concern.

The full report can be read here: <https://apgaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Future-for-Small-Abattoirs-in-the-UK.pdf>



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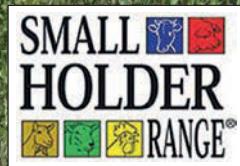


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SMALL HOLDER RANGE

Supplementary summer feeding



Joanna Palmer, nutritionist for Smallholder Range advises what to feed when grass simply isn't enough and where supplementary feeding is necessary for milk or meat production

Jin true British style, let's talk about the weather! After one of the wettest winters in recent years, the dry spring that followed was a welcome relief; muddy pastures quickly dried out and our livestock were able to enjoy glorious sun on their backs out in the fields. For some keepers, the sunshine and warm temperatures helped to make the unprecedented coronavirus lockdown a little more bearable. However, there always seems to be a price to pay for good weather and the lack of spring rain has led to poor grass growth across large parts of the country, which means grazing and conserved forage crops are greatly reduced. With pastures bare and scorched from the hot, dry spring many owners in the driest areas of the country were having to provide supplementary

forage back in May and June. Whether or not a second cut will be available or worthwhile largely depends on the summer rainfall. The additional demand for hay already, on top of reduced yields means it is very likely hay will be in short supply this winter and keepers need to take steps to conserve supplies whilst keeping their livestock well fed to maintain good flock and herd health and continued productivity.

When grazing and forage are in short supply the reliance on compound feeds increases. Whilst compound feeds cannot be used to directly replace grazing and forage, they are invaluable as additional sources of nutrition and feeding rates can often be increased so that a larger proportion of an animal's nutrition comes from their supplementary compound feed.

Compound feeds

It is important to consider carefully the type of feed you choose for your livestock based on their breeding and stage of production. Large scale, commercial livestock production usually relies on feeds with high energy and protein levels to promote fast growth rates and maximise meat and milk production. Cattle and sheep breeds that are more suitable for small scale farming tend to be smaller framed animals than those commonly used in commercial enterprises and can very quickly become overweight on this type of commercial feed. Smallholder Range offers suitable feeds for our native and traditional breeds that are higher in fibre and lower in protein and energy than commercial diets to promote a natural growth rate, with the



emphasis placed firmly on longevity of the animal and quality and flavour of the meat and milk produced.

Ruminant compound feeds usually contain a large proportion of cereals which provide starch as an important source of metabolisable energy to fuel growth. Oil, from ingredients such as linseed is another useful source of energy, but excessive amounts can lessen palatability. Therefore, cattle and sheep feeds are formulated to keep their oil levels below 6% to maintain feed intakes. When it comes to finishing animals, the energy content of feed is closely linked with liveweight gain and fat deposition. The higher the energy level of a feed, the faster animals are likely to gain weight and the more fat coverage they will acquire. Whilst some fat is essential, too much will result in a poor quality carcass, so care should be taken not to overfeed.

The protein content of grass fluctuates greatly depending on the grass species, season, climate and available nutrients in the soil. One of the benefits of supplementing with a compound feed is that you are guaranteed a stable protein supply that is vital for all livestock, regardless of whether the animal is pregnant, lactating or growing. Although the protein level (16%) in Smallholder Range sheep and cattle feeds will be lower than in commercial feeds, the quality of this protein is still of the utmost importance. Soya was once the favoured source of protein in livestock feeds, but many consumers are increasingly concerned about allergies relating to soya, as well as its impact on the environment from large scale production. Soya is predominately grown in the USA, China and South America meaning that its importation incurs significantly more food miles than crops that can be grown in the UK and Europe. With soya being the largest genetically modified (GM) crop grown in the world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to reliably source non-GM soya that is not potentially contaminated with GM material. In response to customers concerns, some feed manufacturers are striving to maintain the important non-GM status of their feeds and to lessen the environmental impact of feeding livestock by reducing the use on soya as a protein source in their feeds. Smallholder Range has successfully replaced soya in its cattle and sheep feeds with dehulled, cooked field beans which are sourced from UK farmers wherever possible, this reduces the feeds' carbon footprint and ensures that only the highest quality, non-GM ingredients are used from assured, reliable suppliers. The inclusion of field beans together with other carefully selected protein sources, including



linseed, wheat and maize provides a good balance of all the essential amino acids needed by livestock at all life stages.

A balance of vitamins and minerals is vital for all species and feeding a compound feed will help to ensure your cattle and sheep receive a balanced diet and prevent deficiencies that can affect growth and performance. However, sheep and cattle do have some differing nutritional needs: for instance, sheep are particularly sensitive to copper and although it is an essential mineral, high levels in their diet can be toxic. Some breeds such as North Ronaldsay, Texel and Suffolk are more susceptible to copper poisoning than other breeds. For this reason, cattle, goat and horse feeds should not be fed to sheep as the higher copper levels could cause severe illness and even death. Always feed compound feeds that have been specifically formulated for each species; if different species are kept together, they will need to be separated at feeding time to ensure they receive the correct feed.

Maintaining rumen health

It is important to remember that as ruminants, cattle and sheep have a large requirement for forage in order to keep their rumens healthy. Problems such as rumen acidosis can occur when the pH of the rumen becomes lower (more acidic) than the ideal level. It is usually caused by a rapid change in diet, particularly when animals move from a forage based diet on to one where there is a greater reliance on supplementary feed. If a ruminant eats a large quantity of rapidly degradable carbohydrates such as starch and sugars found in cereal

based compound feeds, this is fermented by rumen bacteria and lactic acid is produced. This lactic acid is up to ten times more acidic than other volatile fatty acids (VFAs) produced during the fermentation of fibre and causes the pH of the rumen to drop. To prevent acidosis, compound feeds should be introduced gradually and the quantities slowly increased over the course of a couple of weeks to allow the animals' digestive systems time to adapt to the change in diet. To ensure that acidosis doesn't become a problem, it is important to ensure that there is enough fibre in the diet as this helps to keep the rumen at an ideal pH. Carefully planning field rotations to best use the available grazing and striking a balance between feeding enough conserved forage now whilst maintaining winter supplies is key to meeting your livestock's needs now, and in the months to come. A high fibre diet also encourages rumination (cud chewing) which in turn increases saliva production. Saliva contains buffering chemicals which help to neutralise the acids produced during fermentation. A general rule of thumb in helping to prevent acidosis is to ensure that a ruminant's diet consists of no more than 50% compound feed (dry matter). Choosing a compound feed that contains yeast or prebiotics is useful in maintaining a healthy digestive system and an ideal rumen pH.

The importance of water

Water is the most important nutrient for all livestock and during the summer months intakes can greatly increase. Insufficient water intake will lead to a reduced feed intake, which in turn will affect growth and meat and milk production. To ensure a continuous supply of clean, fresh water, troughs should be sited out of direct sunlight to help prevent algae growth and positioned so that the risk of contamination from dung and feed is minimised. They should be inspected and refilled several times a day in hot weather and cleaned regularly.

For more information on feeding your cattle and sheep contact the friendly Smallholder Range Advice Line on 01362 822900 or visit www.smallholderfeed.co.uk



RBST LAUNCHES SPECIAL CAMPAIGN TO SAVE RARE LONGWOOL SHEEP BREEDS



She Rare Breeds Survival Trust has launched a new five year conservation programme to reverse the decline of the Longwool sheep breeds native to the UK.

In the latest RBST Watchlist, published in April 2020, six of the nine native UK Longwool sheep breeds were classified as 'vulnerable' or 'at risk'. While Greyface Dartmoors and Border Leicesters have seen positive growth in their numbers, other breeds such as Lincoln Longwool and Leicester Longwool have declined in number. There were just 251 Lincoln Longwool breeding females registered in 2019.

RBST Chief Executive Christopher Price said: "Longwool sheep are striking animals thanks to features such as long fleeces and pricked ears. Their grazing encourages biodiversity on farms and their tasty meat and natural wool offer good commercial opportunities for their keepers. These breeds made a huge contribution to rural communities when the UK wool trade was booming and it would be devastating if they were to disappear from our landscapes now.

"In general, the Longwool breeds have seen a steady decline and some of the breeds now have very low numbers.

But it is not too late to secure their future, which is why we have launched our new Love a Longwool campaign."

RBST President Jimmy Doherty said: "The Longwool breeds are iconic, with their huge shaggy fleeces and long fringes appealing to livestock enthusiasts and city dwellers alike. RBST is a fantastic, important charity with a great plan to help boost the rare Longwool breeds. I urge everyone who cares about the countryside and appreciates our native breeds to become a member or make a donation on the RBST website."

As part of the new conservation programme, RBST will work with breed societies to increase the diversity within each breed, making the Longwools more resilient. The programme will work to limit inbreeding in each of the Longwool breeds through bespoke breeding programmes and employ cutting-edge conservation techniques and technology to safeguard each of the breeds for the next generations. The Love a Longwool campaign will also improve the breeds' chances of survival by promoting their uses for fibre, meat and conservation grazing, which encourages biodiversity and the regeneration of habitats.

The nine Longwool sheep breeds are Border Leicester, Cotswold, Devon & Cornwall Longwool, Greyface Dartmoor, Leicester Longwool, Lincoln Longwool, Teeswater, Wensleydale and Whiteface Dartmoor.

Flora Searson and Lewis Steer keep more than 600 Greyface Dartmoor, Whiteface Dartmoor and Devon and Cornwall Longwool sheep in Devon. Their business, The Dartmoor Shepherd, sells interior items and accessories made using longwool sheepskins as well as grass-fed hogget. Flora Searson says: "Through our three Longwool breeds, we have found our niche in the industry. They know better than anyone else how to make a living from the landscape, converting grass into meat and wool. Our customers appreciate eating locally sourced, high welfare tasty meat and our sheepskins have a quality you just can't find with modern breeds. We get so much enjoyment from rearing these beautiful animals and playing a part in their conservation for future generations."

To support the charity's work saving rare livestock and equine breeds across the UK, become a member of the RBST or donate by visiting www.rbst.org.uk. **TS**

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Breed focus: Castlemilk Moorit sheep

Helen Babbs meets the graceful, deer-like sheep which came back from the brink of extinction.

The Castlemilk Moorit sheep breed began as the idea of one man, Sir Jock Buchanan-Jardine, in the early 1900s. Wanting something new and decorative to graze the parkland of his Castlemilk estate in Dumfriesshire, Sir Jock began cross-breeding Manx Loaghtan and brown Shetland sheep with wild "mouflon" sheep. This developed the unique Castlemilk Moorit sheep, who thrived on the parkland while also supplying the estate with wool and meat. But in 1970, the estate was sold up. Most of the flock was simply culled, with barely a dozen sheep sold off.

Back from the brink

"It's amazing, all the effort people put in to make sure the Castlemilks were saved," says Kelly Richards, whose current-day Duckpool flock of ten ewes, eight lambs and a ram, is bigger than the original surviving group. Breeders, the newly formed Castlemilk Moorit Society, and the RBST worked together to build up the sheep numbers to the current level of several hundred. "Because it's a small genetic pool, many of the Castlemilks are still closely related, so the breed society offers a 'kinship report,'" explains Kelly, "where they'll check the bloodlines of

your own ewes and match them against available rams for breeding." It's a bit more work than just "putting the tup in," but it's entirely worth it for Kelly. "They are such interesting sheep to keep!"

Graceful grazers

It's more than their rarity which makes Castlemilks attractive. "They're very graceful and deer-like, with their slender legs and small feet," Kelly enthuses. The legs and head are wool-free, which emphasises the Castlemilks' agile appearance. "They have the same very even shade of moorit, which is a Scottish



A single lamb per ewe is most common



Castlemilk ewes



Castlemilk ram

word for brown, fleece across the whole flock, with a white underbelly and white markings around their eyes. The ewes have neatly curving crescent horns, but the rams have wide, thick, double spiral horns. It gives them a very noble look."

Castlemilks are smaller than most commercial breeds, but quite large for a primitive breed, with ewes typically weighing around 40kg and rams up to 55kg. Their light footed nature makes the breed perfect for grazing fragile areas, which is why Kelly got her first Castlemilks in 2014. "We are re-wilding Kilkhampton Common, in North Cornwall," she explains, "so we needed sheep with a low impact on the landscape. The Castlemilks have done a tremendous job, they don't poach the ground and they graze selectively to help the natural plant life grow back."

Beside their grazing and browsing, Kelly tops up the Castlemilks' diet with ewe nuts for the pregnant ewes and over the winter. "They don't need much, it's mainly a way to check everybody's okay. They have a moorland mineral lick too, and that's all. They're very, very hardy. We do always give them a field shelter, though – Cornwall has a lot of wind and rain, especially in the winter! Good fencing is a necessity too, 'cause of their speed and agility, and the young ones will get through any gaps."

Lambs in long grass

In the spring, Kelly brings the pregnant ewes back from the Common to her farm. "They come inside, into the shed, to lamb. They still prefer to be outside during the day, so we lamb the Castlemilks in April, once the weather's better," she explains. Single lambs are most common, but some ewes will produce twins. "They keep it all tucked in," says Kelly, "even a ewe with a double won't look like it. The ewes are very good, protective mothers – they like to hide the lambs in patches of long grass or nettles after lambing, so we let clumps of these grow around the barn! The lambs are quite small and actually blend in quite well, but if you get too close, the mothers will start stamping their feet in warning."



The lambs are small but nimble

One of a kind

This warning isn't aggression, as much as independence. "Their first instinct is flight, not fight," Kelly says. "Even the new lambs are very fast on their feet, and keep up with the ewes. My sheepdogs are a great asset when moving them – if one of the Castlemilks sees an opportunity to run, I won't get there but the dog will! They're also highly intelligent and very inquisitive, so can be readily bucket trained, but halter training isn't so quick – more like horse whispering!"

Out grazing, Castlemilks maintain their independent attitude. "We normally have them with Balwens, but they tend to keep as a flock and sleep in their own group," Kelly describes. "They really know their own kind. Castlemilks have a distinct bleat, although they are quite a quiet breed. They do make a noise when I'm coming with feed, and when the ram goes in, he's quite vocal."

The productive side

The Castlemilk ewes and lambs remain all together until the summer. "We wean in July or early August, although the lambs start to nibble at grass really early on." Before this, all the adults have been sheared. "We do this in May," says Kelly, "because you can almost pluck a Castlemilk fleece, it just breaks away. Some come in for shearing and they've done it themselves already – but I want to harvest the fleece, it's beautiful. Having it blowing around the fields is a waste!"

A whole fleece isn't that heavy, under half a kilo, but it's beautiful and very popular." Kelly sells the soft, kemp-free fleece to hand-spinners. "There's been a massive demand in the last couple of years, the fleece is often sold out even before I've sheared. I love it when people send back photos of what they've done with it."

As well as the Castlemilk Moorit fleece, Kelly also sells breeding stock. "We sell through the breed society and the RBST online Marketplace. It's the first place people who are serious about getting rare breeds tend to look, whereas the local livestock markets are very commercial." Ram lambs not sold for breeding are kept for two years and then go for meat. "They go to the local abattoir, and we sell the skins via an organic tannery in Wales. We did look at doing meat boxes, it's lovely meat, but there are quite a lot of box schemes in Cornwall already, and all the extra work and paperwork would be a bit much at the minute," she explains.

So what's the best thing about Castlemilk moorit sheep? "The lambs are absolutely adorable, with their little spindly legs," says Kelly warmly, "but I just love watching them all, with the sea view down to Duckpool beach behind. They look so beautiful." An elegant and productive part of landscape – just as Sir Jock Buchanan-Jardine intended.

For more information, visit: www.castlemilkmooritsociety.co.uk. Kelly Richards' flock can be seen at: www.westlandbarton.co.uk 

The ewes have crescent-shaped horns





The Rural Youth Project

The Rural Youth Project recently interviewed Donald MacKinnon: a young crofter based on the Isle of Lewis. At the age of 24, Donald balances his time between his role as Development Officer for a local Community Land Trust and tending to the family croft he has inherited. Here, he grazes his flock of sheep between shared common land and his croft land, producing store lambs and meat which he sells locally.

Donald describes crofting as; "a type of landholding which comes with certain rights and responsibilities which aim to protect both the land and the tenant. Tenant crofters have a right to fair rents, the security of long-term tenure and power to pass on this tenure. The responsibilities are that you have a duty to care for the land and cultivate your croft. You must also live within 20 miles of your croft - this is designed to stop people holding on to land when they're not using it".

The crofting counties in the north of Scotland include the former counties of Argyll, Caithness, Inverness, Ross & Cromarty, Sutherland, Orkney, and Shetland. According to Donald, "In Lewis crofts tend to vary from about three to ten acres but crofters usually have access to common land where they can graze their animals. In my township, the common grazing land extends to about 1,600 hectares and is mostly used for sheep and cattle."

Passionate and committed to crofting, Donald is also the Vice Chairman of The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF). The SCF is a small membership organisation that evolved from The Scottish Crofters Union and is the only organisation that is solely dedicated to representing crofters and crofting interests.

Through his leadership role with SCF, Donald is an important mouthpiece for the crofting community, representing crofters and lobbying at Holyrood, Westminster, and European parliament level. Donald emphasises, "we view it as very important that crofters have a voice at policy level. There is always a risk that the bigger organisations take the government attention. It is vital we are accurately represented."

Through the SCF, Donald also campaigns to make crofting more accessible to new entrants, and to make the grants available to support existing crofters, more accessible. For example, at present, Donald and his team at SCF are lobbying for a "bridging loan" to accompany the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS). Whilst the CAGS is undeniably an incredible opportunity for crofters - funding up to 80% towards a wide range of agricultural operations - in its' current form the grant is paid retrospectively,

requiring the crofter to fit the initial bill. As Donald states, "It is such a good intervention and offers a great opportunity to kickstart your rural business but unfortunately it presents a huge cash flow issue for those who don't have the capital - which is likely to be the case for many young crofters applying for the scheme."

In terms of small scale food production, care for the environment and building thriving rural communities, Donald upholds that crofting is as relevant today as it ever has been: "The unique thing about crofting is that it has kept some of the most remote rural communities alive...I believe crofting has a key role in repopulating rural places". Donald highlights the benefits that crofting can bring to communities; "-crofting brings many benefits to rural communities including the availability of local food and maintaining beautiful landscapes but for me - people are the most valuable thing that crofting has to offer, I think that is the most important thing to help rural communities thrive."

Donald believes that creative use of the crofting system could offer, "exciting opportunities around land reform and giving others access to land". He also adds that although many crofters predominantly focus on rearing livestock, "there are countless innovative ways people are using crofts; from tourism, to beekeeping, to growing tea".

Opportunities for local food demand

Following his observations of shifting buying habits during the Covid 19 lockdown, Donald anticipates increased opportunities for crofters to respond to local food demand: "Those first few weeks of lockdown really showed how fragile our food supply chain is and the massive disconnect there is with where our food comes from. We saw a huge uptake in people wanting to buy local food. There is an increasing desire to know where our food comes from and to buy local; crofters are able to respond to this and quite quickly."

Reflecting personally on his lockdown experience, Donald says; "It has reinforced that this is exactly what I want to be doing. Not only has it made me realise how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful part of the world, but also to have the sense of purpose that the croft gives us through looking after the land and the livestock."

Certainly, at what is for many of us is a moment to pause and reassess, the lifestyle that crofting affords could become increasingly attractive. Donald recognises, "there is already a real appetite for crofting as a lifestyle, with many young people aspiring to become crofters".

Acquiring a croft

Unfortunately, however, if you are not lucky enough to inherit or be gifted a croft, acquiring one is not that simple. Donald

outlines the major barriers to entry as "cost and availability". He explains that, "you can't get a bank loan on a croft, so you have to be a cash buyer - the cheapest crofts, without houses - are £15,000 to £20,000, so this prices most new entrants out".

In terms of availability, Donald says, "there are a lot of crofts out there and a lot of land that is not actively being used but much of it is tied up with existing tenants". Despite it being a key responsibility, Donald explains that, "The Crofting Commission who enforce this are under-resourced and they're not able to keep up with it - so the system doesn't really work and it relies on the individual as to whether the croft is actively used and cared for."

However, Donald is hopeful that through his work with the SCF, they can find solutions. He intends to lobby, "for the financial providers to lend on crofts" to overcome the financial barriers to crofting. To overcome the barrier to land access, Donald also suggests the idea of subletting crofts, "I am really keen to drive forward the potential to match new entrants with those who would like to sublet their croft to ensure its survival". Importantly Donald adds, "this also presents a fantastic opportunity for intergenerational mentorship and skills exchange."

Donald is committed to honouring the rich heritage of crofting, whilst creatively innovating to ensure its' future: "Crofting is always evolving. History has shown us it's always adapted, and we shouldn't be afraid to do that." **TS**

The Rural Youth Project is an international grassroots movement whose mission is to empower young people to develop their skills in leadership, enterprise, and activism.

"We need an integrated approach to support young people at both a community and policy level to give them the confidence to reimagine what rural places should look like. In an age of positive disruption, young people have the ability to return the 'purpose' to rural living; utilising their energy and ideas to create a new type of rural." Jane Craigie, Co-founder of RYP

The Rural Youth Project is supported by the LEADER Programme 2014-2020: The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas and is funded as a cooperation project by five LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs); Scottish Borders, Angus, Lanarkshire, Outer Hebrides, and Rural Perth and Kinross

On behalf of the Outer Hebrides LEADER Local Action Group, I am very happy to support any action that helps young crofters. With 6000 crofts on our islands we need more young people to work the land in different ways, with Outer Hebrides LEADER assisting in awarding over £215,000 to Crofting Diversification initiatives. With a mix of animals, crops and working the land, it is a very sustainable lifestyle and should be enjoyed by more."

Matt Bruce, Outer Hebrides LEADER Local Action Group Chairperson.



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Goats vs Fences

Tamsin Cooper explores goat fencing solutions

Tamsin Cooper is a smallholder in north-west France, where she keeps and writes about goats. She follows the latest research in animal behaviour and welfare, and mentors online courses. Find her at www.goatwriter.com.



Post and rail with wire mesh reinforcement at Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats. Photo by Mary Clark.

Goats have a reputation as escape artists – and it's one well earned. Climbing and exploring are natural activities for their agile bodies and inquisitive minds. If their curiosity draws them outside their permitted boundaries, their aptitude for climbing and jumping makes it easy for them to defy many kinds of enclosure. So, we need to be careful to choose the right kind of fence and build it strong enough to make it goat proof.

Escaping comes naturally to goats

Goats evolved in mountainous areas where their ability to jump and scramble up steep mountainsides provided means of escape from predators. In addition, food was hard to find in the wild, and the ability to climb was essential for reaching hard-to-access nutrition. As a result, goats developed active and curious minds, which are stimulated by play and the challenge of reaching a delicious

frond. Many goats, especially youngsters, appear to climb and jump for the sheer enjoyment of play. Some goats actually seek out challenge. Goats with a goal in mind make multiple attempts to surmount an obstacle, such as a fence or a gate. They may attempt this by jumping, climbing, butting, pushing through gaps, or manipulating gate latches with their lips. Through agility, dexterity and sheer determination, they often achieve their aim. And goats learn fast. Once they have found a way through, they do not forget it. Other goats will learn from companions, or even from humans.

The small size of kids and pygmy goats is ideal for squeezing through the smallest gaps and wriggling under fences, and they will work at holes to enlarge them. Kids' and yearlings' light, flexible bodies quickly become skilled at bouncing off walls and scaling leaning posts that their elders may no longer manage.

Moreover, some goats become adept at manipulating bolts, catches and latches. Goats can learn a rather complex sequence of pulling, pushing and sliding to open doors and gates when they want to. For example, at Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats in Kent a few goats have taught themselves to open (and sometimes close) their stalls and the office door.

Goats are tough on fencing

Goats inadvertently weaken fencing through some of their habits. Fences are wonderful surfaces for scratching itchy moulted coats, wooden posts are fun to nibble, and horizontal wires make handy toeholds for front hoofs. A favourite browsing posture for goats is reaching above the head with the front hoofs supported a couple of feet up from the ground. This is just where a fence wire or rail is likely to be positioned. Naturally, goats will use it as foothold to reach overhead branches or greet approaching



Goats stand on rails to greet visitors at Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats. Right: Post and rail fencing at Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats.





Temporary electric netting for rotational grazing.

humans. Butting is a favourite pastime for bucks and wethers, but even females enjoy rubbing their horns along a branch – or even better, a fence post – and giving it a good push. Where goats live in adjacent pastures, they will beat the fence between them when they contest their ranking.

Minimizing the damage

All in all, we are up against a potentially tough challenge when attempting to contain goats. Our endeavour is certainly improved if we look at the enclosure from the goats' point of view. If they are happy and occupied in their allotted space, they will have less of an urge to seek fulfilment outside. Goats need a stimulating environment that meets their need for varied forage, challenging activity and exploration. This is best provided through a series of pastures offering a variety of meadow and woody plants. On a smaller scale, try installing climbing apparatus and offering different kinds of tree and bush foliage. As long as we can keep our goats occupied, we can minimize their escape attempts.

The goat playground can include features that fulfil their butting and scratching needs better than those offered by fencing components. Naturally, goats enjoy rubbing against tree trunks and butting their branches. To emulate this feature, you can affix brushes (such as yard broom heads or door mats) to shelter walls, cable spools or posts that do not form part of your fencing. If your fencing runs under overhanging trees (that are not poisonous for goats), include a hoof rail that allows goats to adopt a browsing posture without dragging down fence wires.

However much we limit damage, we still need tall, strong, fencing to cope with the wear and tear that goats will exert upon it.

Post and rail

This is the best and strongest fence if you can afford it. Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats has a herd of over 140 goats of all shapes, sizes and ages. So they need

to be prepared to contain goats of all abilities. They use sturdy chestnut posts spaced approximately one metre apart. The top rail is fixed at 1.2 metres high, with a base and one or two middle rails. Tensioned stock fencing 900 mm high is attached to the lower rails. The bottom post or wire is close to the ground to prevent kids and small goats wriggling underneath.

Post and stock fencing

A more economical alternative is tensioned stock fencing 950 mm high, consisting of at least ten horizontal wires, attached to stout two-metre tall chestnut posts spaced approximately two metres apart. The top of the mesh needs to be reinforced with a thick galvanised tension wire or it will soon sag. The bottom should be tight to the ground. The middle wires will be trodden down by goats, causing hog ring clips attaching the fence to the tension wire to ping off and wire to stretch. Adding a strengthening rail halfway up will protect the fence from stretching and breaking. Goats may clear this height of fence if they are agile or determined enough, or if there is a nearby surface where they can gain a foothold. To avoid this, you attach add one or two single wires between the posts above the mesh. But never use barbed wire! Goats' curious and clambering nature makes them prone to injury on the sharp metal barbs.

Corner braces of diagonal wooden posts offer climbing opportunities to young and agile goats. Place these at a



Goats use fencing to scratch and shed moulting coats. Right: Goats stretch fencing when they reach through to grasp vegetation.



Kids find their way through the smallest gaps.

low level if possible and step up security on these corners. Gates also offer weak points and you may need to add mesh at the bottom and underneath. Kids can wiggle through larger mesh and enlarge the gaps in older fencing. Stock fencing with smaller mesh at lower levels is recommended.

Electric fencing

Electric tape or netting is a quick temporary solution, but can easily lead to injury. Goats are liable to get entangled and suffer repeated shocks. I have found that it works for temporary parcelling off pastures for rotational grazing, as long as goats are properly trained. If your goats trust you, you can demonstrate fear of the electrified fence as follows: pretend to touch it, then scream and run away. If your goats react by running away, they have probably got the message. However, they can unlearn this lesson. If the fence loses power, they soon test and breach it, often getting stuck in the process. This is doubly dangerous when the power comes back on.

Regular maintenance

However strong your fencing, it will weaken and stretch with time and use. It is wise to regularly check along its length, repair any holes, tighten tension wires, and reinforce wobbling posts. Also be careful to avoid exposed sharp metal that could cause injury. All things considered, taking the time and expense to get this right will avoid costly damage and frustration. **TS**





Alpaca FENCING

discussed by Joy Whitehead

Alpacas, like horses, can jump well but rarely jump fences. Stock fencing or close railing is normally adequate for alpacas. We recommend 90 cm stock fencing with 2 plain wires above to achieve an overall height of 120cm. Alpacas enjoy rubbing along fences so try and avoid barbed wire because this can ruin their valuable fleece. Electric fencing may be useful in some circumstances, but never for perimeter fencing as occasionally we have found that an alpaca (and it normally is only one) just can't resist exploring and its insulating coat seems to make it immune to the electric current, but then normally it will go back to its friends again the same way.

If you are taking over paddocks that are new to you and there are already barbed wire fences, they may need replacing. However, if just the top one or two wires are barbed this may be okay, providing the wires are properly strained and not floppy. If there is post and rail fencing in place, then smaller alpacas may be able to roll underneath, so in this case I would suggest adding 90cm stock fencing to the lower part to avoid problems.

Hedges

Hedges are a possible alternative or addition to fencing and can provide excellent natural shade and shelter

as well as offering browse for your alpacas, providing additional minerals and vitamins to supplement the nutrition they derive from grazing their paddocks. Hedges should be dense enough to keep the alpacas in their paddock; if there are gaps it may be necessary to erect a fence just inside the hedge.

Hedges need regular maintenance - hedge cutting is normally done in October or November to avoid the bird nesting season, and the most efficient way is to find a contractor who can do this with a tractor. But although the actual cutting is quick, you may need to spend time picking up and burning or otherwise disposing of any thorny hedge clippings that remain, as the last thing you want is for these to be picked up in your alpacas' fleeces. If your hedge includes brambles try and get rid of as much as you can early in the season, before the bramble growth gets long enough to break off, as that will surely find its way

into the fleeces also. Hedges can be a mixed blessing, but they are well worth the work, as they are much more pleasant to look at than bare fences, and improve your farm ecosystem, providing natural habitat for a huge variety of wild creatures.

Hedges provide excellent natural shelter

Gates

If you only have a few alpacas grazing a small area then you may be able to maintain the area without resorting to large machinery which might involve farm vehicles. In this case small access gates would probably suffice. But if you expect to use contractors on your land, then make sure your gates are wide enough to allow access for farm vehicles

Handling areas

We need to be able to handle alpacas for many different reasons: giving injections, trimming toenails, veterinary inspections, taking faecal samples, checking newborns, even getting brambles, thistles, cleavers etc out of their coats. Actually the easiest solution to the last problem on my list is to keep pastures clean so then there is nothing to get tangled in their fleece. That aside, to tackle any of these jobs, first catch your alpaca.

Alpacas are very curious creatures, and will almost always want to know what you are doing, so will often come very close to you. However, they know exactly how long your arms are, so reaching out in the hope of just slipping your arm around their neck can be somewhat optimistic. A catch pen is the answer, possibly just

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Handling pens



A relaxed well-balanced alpaca



Badger-proof fencing

inside an access gate: use fencing or hurdles, but avoid sheep hurdles as they are too short. Mobile handling pens are also available. At Bozedown Alpacas we sometimes collect our alpacas in the barn for various tasks - weighing, shearing, ultrasound scanning for pregnancy diagnosis, etc. We also have a series of outdoor pens that we use for matings and many other tasks such as giving worming drenches, condition scoring, etc.

Even with just half an acre, we recommend dividing this into two areas for efficient grazing. Water can be installed on the fence line. A shelter and catch pen can also be accessible from either side. With the alpacas in the catch area you may find 'wands' (long sticks) helpful to effectively lengthen your arms just while you corner one of them. Once cornered it is simple to quietly slip your arm around the alpaca's neck at which point, providing you allow the alpaca to remain balanced on all 4 legs, it should stand still. It is normally only when taken off-balance that an alpaca will struggle.

On each part of our farm the fields are laid out so that we can open any field gate into a laneway and then the alpacas, who love going through gates,

An alpaca will struggle if taken off-balance when being handled

will amble or run along to our catch areas. Our paddock layout and handling areas have been developed over many years, as we have required them.

Badgers

Badgers are the focus of intense public debate in the United Kingdom. They are an iconic wildlife species in British society and are protected under U.K. legislation. In the U.K. they are also a reservoir of *Mycobacterium bovis*, the causative agent of tuberculosis in badgers, cattle and alpacas. Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is a major animal health challenge in the U.K. that results in substantial financial losses to both taxpayers and farmers, with farmers losing immensely valuable genetics also. Control of TB in cattle and alpacas is complicated by the reservoir of infection in badgers.

Badgers first became protected in 1973 following the introduction of the Badger Act. Later the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 came into UK law, protecting the sett as well as the badger. Badgers are protected not because they are in any way rare or endangered, but because of illegal badger baiting, which

involves digging out setts and using dogs.

A badger sett survey carried out by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency found that the number of badger colonies in England and Wales had doubled in the previous 25 years, from 31,500 in 1988 to at least 64,000 main setts in 2013 (Judge et al 2014).

The researchers remit had been setts (social groups) and not badger numbers. In 2017 the same researchers estimated the number of badgers in the same area to be 485,000. Not all badgers are infected with TB; check out the situation in your area on <https://www.ibtb.co.uk>. If you are in or near a badger hotspot, you may wish to consider badger-proof fencing.

Badger fencing

Badger-proof fencing has a much closer mesh plus higher tensile strength than stock fencing, but badgers can easily dig under fences. There are two possibilities which avoid this. The first option is above ground only, with at least 2 strands of electric wire placed low down outside the fence with insulated attachments to the posts. This requires regular weed killing outside the perimeter and daily monitoring to ensure that the wires remain clear.

With the second option the badger fencing is installed under as well as above ground, with the lower part of the fence buried underground and hinged away from the paddocks that need the protection. Gateways must all be concreted across their spans, again to prevent the badgers from burrowing. **TS**

■ Joy Whitehead has been breeding and showing alpacas since 1989, with niece Mary-Jo Smith, a BAS certified judge, joining her in 2000. In South Oxfordshire they farm more than 350 huacayas and suris from prizewinning pedigree bloodlines. For more information, check our web site, www.bozedown-alpacas.co.uk



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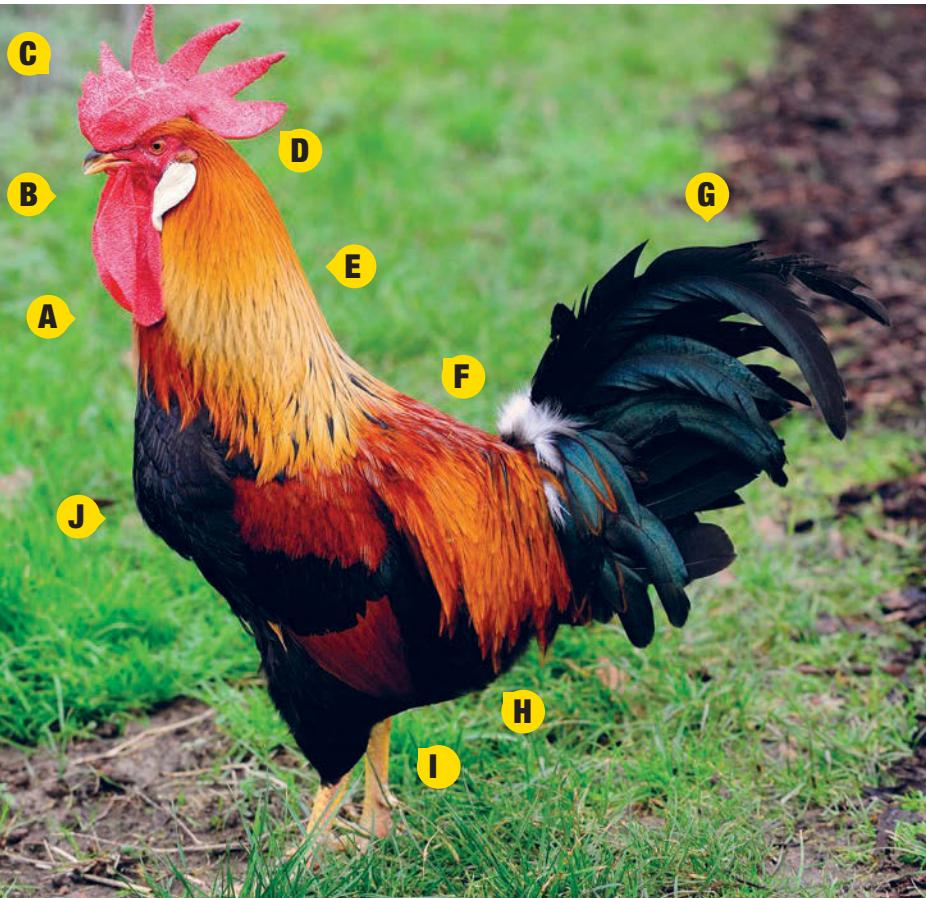


Hexafly: Grub for Hens

BREED FOCUS
Leghorn



With its lively character, pleasing colours and impressive laying, the Leghorn will appeal to the small-scale keeper, *says Chris Graham*



THE Leghorn originated in Italy, as one of the white ear-lobed Mediterranean breeds, and found favour in several other European countries due to its laying prowess. But it was in America that the breed was most extensively developed.

The first brown examples were exported there during the 1830s, and it's thought that they took their name from the Italian port of Ligorno, from where the ships departed.

Breeders in the USA used the Leghorn as the basis for important breeding programmes, including one that resulted in the creation of the Rhode Island Red. However, the first Leghorns imported to Britain during the 1870s were thought too small, so breeders boosted size of the white by crossing it with Minorca and Malay fowl.

The breed – especially in its white form – has also played a crucial role in the development of many of the modern hybrid layers and was, at one time, the

mainstay of the British commercial laying flock.

The Leghorn's striking appearance is dominated by its large, single comb, which should always stand proudly upright on male birds, but falls to one side on the female. The breed presents an attractively-proportioned, firm and well-feathered body, which is wide at the shoulder and narrows towards the tail.

The back is reasonably long and slightly sloping, while the breast is full and prominent. Tails are moderately full and typically held at an angle of 45°, with male birds featuring a handful of sweepingly-curved sickle feathers.

Standard must-haves

Keepers can choose from 13 standardised versions, but all Leghorns should have a yellow- or horn-coloured beak and red eyes. Face and wattles must be bright red, the ear lobes pure white (can be creamy), and the legs yellow/orange and featherless.

What to look for in buying

A In the exhibition breed, the head accounts for 25 per cent of the judging points. Well balanced overall, with long, thin, finely textured and crease-free wattles.

B Beak short, stout, yellow or horn. Tip ideally clear of front edge of comb.

C Single comb is most common. Fine texture, straight and erect, moderately large. Serrations deep and even, each spike broad at its base. Comb should extend well beyond back of head, and follow – without touching –line of upper neck. On female, comb should be folded to one side, without obscuring vision.

D Eyes prominent, red across all plumage colours.

E Ear lobes well developed and pendant, matching in size, smooth, open and free from folds. Colour pure, opaque white. Cream tolerated. Any red represents a serious fault.

F Back long and flat, sloping slightly towards tail.

G Tail on male moderately full and carried at 45° from line of back. Full, wide and sweeping sickle feathers desirable. Female's tail carried lower and is more whipped.

H Wings large, tightly carried and well tucked. Watch out for white on tips of flight feathers.

I Legs and feet yellow or orange. Avoid birds with flat-fronted shins.

J Breast round, full and prominent, carried well forward with straight breastbone. Body wide at the shoulder, tapering slightly towards tail.

Both large fowl and bantam versions are available. Today, American and continental Leghorns are bred to completely different standards to the one approved by the Poultry Club of Great Britain. Generally, the 'foreign' versions are smaller, with smaller combs but larger tails.

The brown is the most popular enthusiasts' bird among the large fowl, while the blacks and whites are favoured most strongly by bantam keepers. The bantam is often superior as a layer. Typically you can expect a 2oz egg from a healthy large fowl hen while those

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Left: White bantam female. Note that the folded comb doesn't obscure vision and the desirable, whipped tail **Right:** Black male displaying good comb, breast and leg colour

from an equivalent bantam are just 1/2oz lighter.

Large fowl Leghorns can be more of a struggle to buy than bantam versions; the number of breeders producing quality large stock in decent numbers remains relatively limited. The Leghorn Club (www.theleghornclub.com) is the place to look, but first decide whether you require birds for laying or exhibition. There remain a few decent laying strains in the UK, from which keepers can expect 260 eggs a season. Exhibition-type whites might only lay 130 eggs. But blacks and some of the other colours, including the brown and the exchequer, perform much better, producing perhaps 200 eggs a year.

Colour choices

Most Leghorns represent a practical proposition for the domestic keeper. It's a hardy breed that enjoys a free-ranging, foraging lifestyle, except in very cold weather. Most popular are the black, white and brown, followed closely by the blue and the cuckoo. Beyond this, the cupboard starts to get bare: there are two mottled options, but other options remain scarce, though enthusiasts are working to add to the colour list.

This is a flighty breed, though much depends on how birds are reared and looked after. With the Mediterranean roots in the background, an excitable character is on the cards, so those in an urban environment may consider a covered run. However, Leghorns that are well looked after can become reasonably

easy to handle. Breeders who care for their birds properly, adopting a calm, hands-on approach to rearing, won't have problems. Leghorn hens will go reliably broody and make excellent mothers thereafter.

So, all being well, the Leghorn is a great back-garden prospect. It's friendly bird that's straightforward to look after. Fertility rates are pretty good and the chicks hatch strongly and grow well. It's perfectly possible to hatch 200 birds from a single trio, in one season. However, the key to breeding success is good selection. Those with ambitions in the show pen must expect "wastage" as far as head quality is concerned.

Keen exhibitors will need to run separate cock and/or pullet-breeding pens, selecting carefully to achieve good comb type.

Careful with feed

The large fowl do have potential for leg problems. Because these are fast-growing birds, it's important that they are fed on a strict chick crumb/growers pellet-only diet. Supplementing the feed with mixed corn or other treats during the early months is likely to promote leg-related undesirables such as bent toes or knock-knees.

Also, breeders should take care not to mix plumage colours because this will promote feather pecking. Young blacks



Good width to the male sickle feathers is a desirable breed characteristic **Right:** Check wing feathers for white tipping. Birds with this sort of defect shouldn't be used for breeding

(especially bantams) seem particularly prone to this. So, as soon as they are large enough to move out of the brooder, separate them into plumage colour groups. Once adult, though, Leghorns of any colour can happily be run with a mixed flock in the back garden.

For most new keepers, the tribulations of breeding won't be an issue. Adult birds bought as laying hens –bantams or large fowl – should provide a wonderful and useful choice for the garden, offering a years of productive service and pleasure. **TS**

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Work with waterfowl to keep them well

Liz Fairbrother says prevention is always better than cure

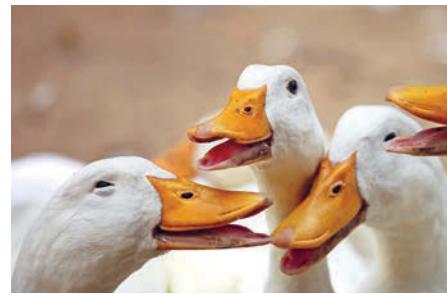
Waterfowl, given the right conditions for them, are very hardy birds and will naturally remain healthy. New owners worry a lot about disease but if you get the management correct, the birds will normally stay happy and well without too much intervention from you. So what are the rules for keeping waterfowl well?

Observation, observation and observation

Time spent leaning over a gate just watching your stock while you get to know them and them to you is not misspent. First you have to know what is normal behaviour for that flock. If you know this then you will soon recognise when something starts to go wrong. So take time out to watch your ducks and geese. See who the leader is, how they interact with each other, how much they splash in the water, how eagerly they forage and what they do when you let them out in the mornings. You'll then be confident that the duck who doesn't come out of the house with the others is not behaving normally, may be ill or may be going broody or the goose that usually grazes enthusiastically but is standing still, is not their normal self for a reason you then need to discover.

Get a good vet

Not all vets are expert with poultry so it's worth taking time to check out the local practices before registering. If you have a good all round farm veterinary practice or an avian specialist then treat them like gold dust and be faithful clients as they



are getting fewer and fewer. With all vets, the more information you can provide, the more the chance of treating the bird so if you do have to phone the vet or visit ensure you have the age, the sex and if possible the breed of bird handy, how it has been kept in particular the diet and access to water and the symptoms including when first exhibited.

The right mixture

Imagine how horrible it would be to live in a cramped space with people that bullied you, to the point of hurting you. Yet far too many waterfowl have just this experience. Make sure your waterfowl have plenty of space and that you never, ever overstock. Ensure that the group get along – it's really not acceptable to have something so far down the pecking order that they are harassed or injured by the others. It's certainly not acceptable to have more than one drake harassing the ducks and because they do actually have penises unlike cockerels, repeated mating will injure the duck internally. Watch out for sexually over active drakes and remove them from the pen. If the duck is very bald around her head and her body is very flat to the ground, she is

suffering from his attentions – get rid of the drake by penning separately or consigning him to the freezer. You only need one drake for a number of ducks. At this time of the year, when ducklings are growing out, now is the time to fill your freezer with fattened drakes, kept separately from the others.

The right home

Ducks are the messiest birds you could image as are geese so they need more space than poultry and you need to be able to clean out their run. The run must give them space to behave naturally and to forage. You cannot keep ducks in a standard sized ark or poultry house – they need to have a larger run. Free range can be difficult due to the attention of the foxes but ensure that you build the largest run you can manage and don't overstock it. Let them out when you are working on the smallholding (it should be enough to discourage the fox from visiting when you are outside).

Location, location, location

Waterfowl by their very nature, like cool conditions with access to water. They do not like extreme heat. Be careful the house and run is not sited in direct sunlight with no access to shade. Ensure that the ventilation allows a good flow of air. The most common cause of all respiratory problems in waterfowl is stuffy housing with inadequate ventilation coupled with soiled bedding not regularly removed. Add a leaking house to the equation and you have the perfect recipe for severe ill health in your birds. Respiratory diseases will need veterinary help with antibiotics but also look for causes. **PP**

Preparing your incubator for storage

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You've finished hatching, and the time has come to put your incubator away until the Spring. There are few simple steps that you can follow to make sure your incubator is in top condition ready for your next hatch.

Your incubator should be cleaned immediately after your hatch is complete. As incubators are warm and wet, they are ideal breeding grounds for bacteria and if they have been left with debris from the last hatch, they will harbour germs which are highly likely to damage your next hatch. To help to reduce this risk Brinsea incorporate Biomaster™ Antimicrobial

Protection into their incubator cabinets during manufacture. Biomaster Protection is embedded within the plastic itself which prevents the growth of harmful bacteria helping to provide the optimum environment for hatching. Products made with Biomaster still need cleaning thoroughly as the effect of Biomaster is at the plastic surface only.



To get the best out of your incubator we suggest you follow this handy guide:

Firstly, disconnect the incubator from the mains power supply during cleaning. When you're cleaning your incubator, it is important to ensure that all electrical parts are kept dry.

After removing any old shells, fluff and dirt, it is best to soak non-electrical parts like egg trays in a disinfectant solution for an hour before scrubbing clean. We would recommend using Brinsea Incubation

Disinfectant which is both powerful and safe and has been specially formulated to kill bacteria and fungi associated with birds. It's available online from www.brinsea.co.uk (code 14.35) or from many Brinsea distributors. Do not use the dishwasher to wash parts from your incubator, the dishwasher will run too hot, and there is a good chance that plastic parts will become warped.

Once you have cleaned the non-electrical parts, carefully clean around heaters and fans with a brush or slightly damp cloth using the same disinfectant solution. Be very careful not to let water get near any electrical parts including motors, heaters and control housings.

It is important to rinse the disinfectant off with clean water off and leave the incubator parts to dry thoroughly. If they are properly clean, they should no longer

have a strong odour. Don't forget to clean any extra parts or equipment you have used too.

Reassemble your incubator, then we recommend running the incubator dry for 24 - 48 hours to ensure all parts dry out thoroughly – this step should not be missed out. If an incubator is stored wet then corrosion can damage circuit boards and other components. Please note that corroded parts are not covered under any guarantee. Once completely dry, store your incubator and accessories in a protective carton or box in a cool dry location where it won't get jostled or knocked over. We do not recommend storing in a shed or outdoor building as these can get cold and damp.

Don't forget to order any spare parts or consumables needed for your next season, such as evaporating papers, silicon tubing for humidity pumps, more disinfectant. If you have lost your instructions you can download them free from the Brinsea website: www.brinsea.co.uk/latest/resource-centre/instructions **PP**

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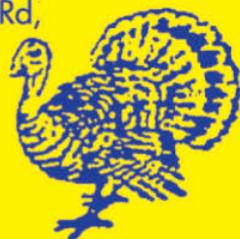
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Parasite PREVENTION



Chickens like to dust bathe in dry soil to help get rid of external parasites

Janice Houghton-Wallace looks at unwanted visitors affecting your poultry

However well you are looking after your chickens with good housing, appropriate feed, fresh water and a green area in which to scratch and exercise, your good husbandry does not stop there. Routine veterinary requirements are a must to keep the birds healthy, which includes the eradication of internal and external parasites.

Worm eggs and larvae occur naturally in the environment, inside earthworms, insects and wild birds – all of which are intermediate hosts or carriers. Contaminated soil and dirty poultry litter can also harbour eggs and larvae. These can also stick to footwear, poultry equipment and even pets. Worm eggs are able to live in the soil for years so good hygiene and treating the birds to keep worms at bay is essential. All birds are vulnerable to worms and once inside the bird the adult worm lays more eggs which are then passed out into the environment and the cycle begins again.

Worms may be visible in droppings

The most common worm found in poultry is *Ascaridia galli* (Roundworm), which can be a serious threat. There need only be a few adult worms in the chicken's intestines, from which numerous larvae will develop resulting in a health problem. They are capable of causing a necrotic-like enteritis and subsequent E.coli infection as well as migrating to other organs, in particular the liver and causing damage. Severe infestation of roundworms can block the intestines, even causing them to rupture and may be visible in the bird's droppings.

Cestodes (Tapeworm) is a segmented parasitic worm that attaches itself to the small intestine by the head. Growth is from the head outwards, so the segments furthest from the head are the ripest and contain the eggs. These egg containing segments will break away and eventually be passed out of the bird's body via the droppings. The minute eggs are then

ingested by another being, such as an insect, slug or earthworm. The chicken then becomes infected when it eats the insect that contains the tapeworm cyst. There are many different species of tapeworm that poultry are hosts to and these can vary from minuscule worms to some around 25cms (10 inches) in length.

Syngamus trachea (Gapeworm) is a nematode parasitic worm, which lives in the bird's windpipe. They can so severely infest this part of the anatomy that the bird chokes, hence the 'gaping' for breath and the name. Infection is via the oral route, with earthworms, slugs and snails being the worm hosts. Gapeworm is more likely to affect free-range birds, especially where gathering of wild birds are present.

Other worms affecting poultry are *Capillaria contorta* (Hairworm), a thin, pale coloured roundworm that infests the crop and oesophagus; *Capillaria obsignata* which is found in the small intestine; *Heterakis gallinarum* (Caecal

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Hens love eating worms but they can introduce parasitic problems

worm), a nematode parasitic worm found in the caecum, which causes inflammation of the caecum but more importantly it carries another parasite, *Histomonas meleagridis*, which causes a fatal disease called Blackhead in turkeys.

Poultry should be wormed from around 6-8 weeks of age and thereon after about four times a year if the chickens are periodically moved to fresh pasture, housing litter is kept clean and feeding and drinking equipment cleaned on a regular basis. Where there are flocks of wild birds, such as starlings, sparrows or crows living near poultry, then the risk of the poultry harbouring worms as well as external parasites will be greater.

If poultry are kept in one area alone or on land that has had poultry on it for several years, then worming needs to be carried out more frequently. Clean pas-

ture is paramount and the use of mobile housing for a small number of chickens, whereby the unit can be moved, often daily, will help to prevent a build of faecal infection. Worming alone will not deal with the problem if good husbandry practices are not adhered to. Without this attention chickens will not remain worm free and quickly become re-infested.

A product can only be marketed as a wormer if it has been licensed by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. Approved poultry wormers in the form of medicated feed supplements which can be sourced via veterinary practices, agricultural merchants or the internet are Flubenvet by Elanco and Flubendazole by Kernform. Marriage's and Heygates are two feed manufacturers that produce poultry layers pellets with Flubenvet included in the feed.



A red poultry mite under the microscope

External parasites love warm weather

During warm weather external parasites are more active and can have a devastating effect on a bird's environment and eventually the bird's health. Poultry should be checked for lice, fleas, ticks and mites. Lice live on their hosts all the time, feeding off dead skin and feathers and laying eggs mainly around the vent area. There are different variations of chicken lice, all of which live on the part of the bird appropriate to their name. These being the head louse, fluff louse, body louse (two types), wing louse and feather shaft louse.

A pyrethrum based powder will quickly deal with lice. One treatment should have an immediate effect but it is advisable to dust again after a two week interval. Put the powder on the skin under the fluff below the vent, under each wing and under the feathers at the base of the neck. This treatment will also deal with chicken fleas and ticks. Chicken fleas can be seen on birds during the day but after a feed they will jump off and live in floor litter and nesting material. As soon as you see fleas on your chickens dust the birds and remove all litter and nesting material, burning it if possible and spray



A rookery and crows nests can be harbingers of parasites



A bantam Yokohama with gapeworm.



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Even when kept in ideal conditions parasites still need to be addressed



or dust the housing thoroughly with an appropriate product.

The Northern fowl mite is a minuscule parasite that lives and feeds off the bird all the time and will cause anaemia and death. Damp patches on the feathers will appear and beneath these will be tiny moving 'ground pepper' spots. An anti-mite spray or pyrethrum based powder is the quickest way of killing this parasite. If the bird has been heavily infested then give it a bath to rid it of all the dirt deposits after treatment.

The scaly leg mite burrows under the scales and deposits of the mite result in them becoming rough and protruding. Treatments vary from Benzyl benzoate from a veterinary practice or online to surgical spirit and petroleum jelly, all of which serve to suffocate the mite. New scales take a year to re-grow but do not attempt to remove the protruding ones as this would be extremely painful for the bird.



A Silkie hen's vent area black with Northern mite.

The red mite is a common external parasite of birds causing irritation, stress and eventually death. Red mite are about 1mm in size and can live up to six months without feeding, so any poultry housing left empty for a long period can still contain the mites, by which time they will be very hungry.

Rid housing of mites

During the daytime the mites live in crevices within the housing and underneath perches and then climb onto the birds at night, sucking their blood whilst they are roosting. They feed off the bird for anything up to two hours before returning to their hiding places. Red mite can inflict great damage because the birds can become anaemic and subsequently lose vitality and condition. Always check as much of the housing as you can to see if there are any spots of grey powder present for these are red mite eggs. Should they be found the birds will need to be re-



Protruding scales caused by scaly leg mite.

housed so you can deal with the problem, giving them an anti-mite treatment beforehand. Remove all litter and ideally burn it. Then power wash the housing throughout. Once clean, spray it with a strong disinfectant such as Virkon S. When nearly dry apply an approved insecticide for red mite to the entire interior paying special attention to perches and nest boxes. Leave the housing to dry before replacing the birds. However, if the infestation was very bad it would be worthwhile leaving the birds in their temporary accommodation and re-spraying the house again after ten days for that is the lifecycle of the red mite in warm weather and it is amazing how some mites or their eggs can escape the onslaught of any initial treatment.

There are also some natural remedies available to help keep the mites at bay such as Diatom powder, which is an abrasive and pierces the waxy coating of the mite causing it to dry and perish. Using this on a regular basis spread around the housing can help eliminate the mites. Poultry Shield, which is diluted with water and sprayed on has a similar effect on the mites.

Spot-on treatments for small numbers of birds may be recommended by a veterinary surgeon in certain situations.

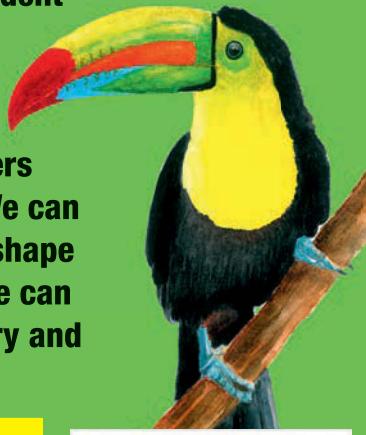
If there are flies around the poultry do check for any signs of fly strike. It is not just sheep that suffer from this dreadful infestation. Just as in other animals, the flies lay their eggs around the rear and if the vent is dirty the maggots will be soon make a dreadful impact. **PP**



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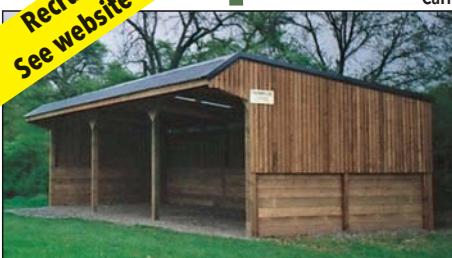


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Stop your chickens suffering from pesky Red Mite this Summer

As temperatures begin to rise don't let your chickens be part of the 430 million¹ in Europe riddled with red mite.



Reported as the most common health problem a chicken keeper will face, red mite could be seriously impacting the health and welfare of your pets.

"Over the years red mite has been a continuous challenge for owners of backyard poultry, as it is extremely hard to spot and treat, with many people experiencing reoccurring infestations in chicken coops," says Steve Smith, EBVS® European Veterinary Specialist in Avian Medicine and Surgery.

"However, these parasites which live in the cracks and crevices of hen houses cause extreme discomfort for chickens by feeding off the bird's blood often causing severe anaemia.

"As well as anaemia, these mites can cause weight loss, a reduction in eggs produced and can cause death in extreme cases. To make matters worse, the parasites are known to carry diseases which can be transmitted to chickens, including Salmonella and E.coli," explains Steve.

One of the biggest problems for owners is that it is difficult to identify whether red mite is present in chickens, as they are commonly only active, and therefore visible, at night. Working with poultry owners and vets, Steve has found some effective ways to check for the presence of red mite.

"At the end of the day, place a white sheet on the floor of the coop, near the birds and wait for at least an hour, or ideally five hours, after dark when the mites will be most active," explains Steve.



"After this time, when you shine a torch on the white sheet you should be able to see grey or red spots if red mite are present.

"Another way in which you can check for red mite is by running your hand under the perches, again at night, to see if red mite are present there. This is because the mites will travel to the chickens to feed, so can be visible around nesting areas," adds Steve.

Despite red mite being a significant issue in backyard chickens, there has been limited treatment options, which are effective in removing high infestations, available to backyard chicken owners.

"Many over-the-counter remedies will help reduce the number of red mite present in your chicken coop, but will not completely clear the infestation as they focus on treating the environment rather than the animal. Thankfully, there is now a new presentation of an existing effective treatment which can help you to clear red mite from your chickens. Owners should speak to their vet to find out more about this effective solution," concludes Steve.

This information was provided by MSD Animal Health, manufacturer of EXZOLT®.



About MSD Animal Health

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DON'T LET YOUR CHICKENS SUFFER WITH POULTRY RED MITE



Poultry red mite bites are painful and can cause skin irritation and stress to your chickens. Mites only feed at night and spend most of their time hiding in the crevices of the coop, so you might not even know they are there.

Historically, treatment of poultry red mite has been difficult. Now there is a straightforward treatment to help combat this pesky parasite.

CONTACT YOUR VET FOR MORE INFORMATION.

THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED BY MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, MANUFACTURERS OF EXZOLT®

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Property for Poultry

Jane Rooks asks what is the perfect home for you and your poultry?

Estate agents have reported a surge in interest for properties in more rural areas. Rightmove has given a regional breakdown in where buyer demand was strongest in the month of June.

It's perhaps no surprise, they say, that the north west of England, Yorkshire and the Humber side are the locations with the biggest search demand.

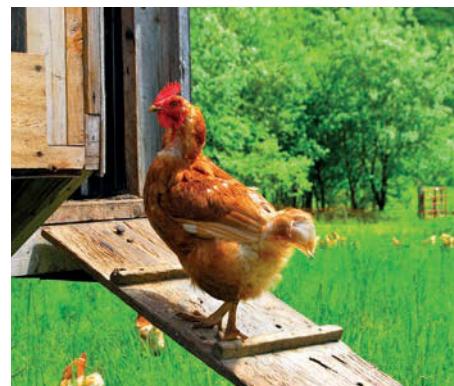
Hereford in the West Midlands tops the list with Wigan, Rochdale, Wilmslow and Scarborough making up the rest of the top five.

The coastal town Hastings the only place from the south of England to make the top 10 list.

But what makes a good property for keeping poultry? The following considerations also apply in more urban areas although you may need to adapt your poultry keeping to not having cockerels and looking at smaller breeds.

Safety first

Poultry always need to be protected from predators although it is worth noting that those close to forests and woods may well attract more than their fair share of creatures looking for a meal. But there are some easy wins when looking at a property. Is it directly on to a road? If so then you will need to have good fencing at a reasonable height to stop birds from ending up on the tarmac. Is there an area that lends itself to being securely fenced or will you have to create a new one? For example a small orchard could be fenced and provide shade and fallen fruit and may be preferable to an area in open land where shade and interest will need adding. Hens are 'jungle fowls' in their origins.



Let it drain

Poultry are fairly hardy but only waterfowl can manage mud and puddles and they will just wreck the surface completely. Ideally you need lightish land (eg sandy or chalky) that free drains and no sign of a boggy area. If viewing in the summer look out for 'poaching' where animal and birds have trodden repeatedly on an area and left it unlevel with no grass. Also watch out for bog plants that like water that are left over from the winter weather - they are telling you this area gets very very wet. These days vendors rarely look at soil type but it's worth finding out.



Top tip

Whatever land you have, you can help it by not overstocking - understock - less birds than recommended per acre, many less if they are to be pets rather than commercial or semi-commercial.

Nearby Neighbours

Most poultry keepers have neighbours and everyone gets along just fine. But don't walk into trouble. The closer the neighbours, the more you need to consider what type of poultry you are going to keep and it's not unreasonable for neighbours to object to a cacophony of cockerels even in the country or object to being shot out of bed by the wail of your peacocks at dawn on a summer morning. I'm very lucky with my neighbours who like my peacocks but if you want to keep birds that are loud then do try and choose a property a bit further away from other people.

Housing

There is some excellent purpose built poultry housing so that's not a problem but you will also need a strong shed to store feed and bedding and somewhere



for a compost/muck heap for the soiled bedding. If living in a more built up area, you'll need to site this very carefully to avoid smell, flies and rats.

ON SALE

One of the questions we get asked repeatedly at *Practical Poultry* is whether you can sell eggs at the gate. The answer to that is yes and er no. Yes you can if you don't grade them - no problem at all. But if you are on a road where it is dangerous to have traffic stop and it might cause an accident, then no - your friendly local Council will soon be visiting. Normally you do not have to seek planning unless it is a commercial enterprise and even then many councils turn a blind eye if you have a safe pull in on a suitable road.

The other consideration is that if you do want to keep chickens so you can sell some eggs, do choose a road where people can find you, especially if you feel your efforts will eventually upgrade to a farm shop.

Rights of Way

If there is a right of way eg footpath, bridleway or byway on your land that is on the definitive map then you cannot just divert it or close it. If you don't like the idea of one then don't buy the property. On the other hand, selling eggs to walkers is a nice little income.

And finally, have a look round in the area for a good feed merchant that sells at farmer and smallholder prices rather than garden centre prices on feed. Where will you buy bedding? Is there a vet who has an interest in avian medicine in the area? Vets get basic training on birds but not all see very many poultry or have taken them up as a speciality, check out their websites. Is there a smallholding group? They have good local knowledge and no doubt will be the start of a whole new social life! **PP**



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Chicken & Eggs – Covid Consequences

Jane Howorth ponders when poultry made the news pages

Isn't it fascinating how we have all learned so rapidly to socially distance, become extremely conscious of hygiene and know to value a low R number which if low enough allows us to loosen the rules currently governing our everyday lives. I've been amazed at our capacity to cope under these extreme circumstances, especially for those who have additional responsibilities such as caring for a vulnerable person, coping with a health issue or having young children to entertain. Thank goodness then that at least the weather has been kind to us throughout and lockdown has been bearable for many because being outside is simply one of life's greatest pleasures.

On consideration how lucky, too, for those of us that keep hens as we have more reason than most to potter in our gardens and take advantage of the extra time we have been given to attend to all those little jobs we have put off until now, but that hen keeping creates.

But what has been happening to the world of chicken and eggs since lockdown began, both for the charity and for poultry farmers and how can we as hen keepers and devotees of our feathered friends do our bit to help?

Local heroines

We all know that eggs became as rare as hens' teeth – overnight – when lockdown commenced and baking suddenly became one of few pleasurable activities left for us to enjoy within the safe confines of our homes. Whilst supermarket shelves emptied of loo rolls (has anyone ever established why that happened?!), flour and eggs, little flocks of pet hens across the country as rapidly and unexpectedly attained the status of feathery local heroines for keeping villages supplied with fresh and tasty eggs.

Momentarily there was scaremongering about theft so sought-after did laying hens become, but largely this was fake news and we heard no reports of theft taking place, thankfully.

Hens waiting patiently

As for the popularity of hen keeping – it's set to soar post Covid19 – as the re-evaluation of life has led to waiting lists for ex-commercial hens growing 3-fold on the same period last year. Altruism thrives as volunteers continue offer to help put hens into homes once we're able to start working again, and

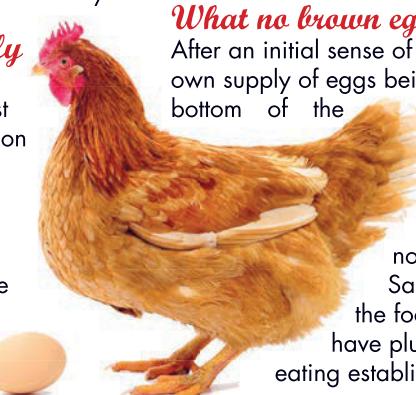
kind-hearted supporters continue to wish us well despite our disappointment that no hens are currently coming out from farms.

In April the media caught the whiff of a trend and hens popped up everywhere including on BBC Countryfile, BBC R4 You & Yours, Kate Humble's Ch5 A Country Life for Half the Price, national newspapers, the Economist, and even across the pond in the US Spectator and Vogue magazines. All these appearances focussed on either the increased value of food provenance, the impressive increased fascination of hen keeping or simply the pure charm of hens.

As a result tens of thousands of hens will be wending their way to family homes once Covid19 permits.

What no brown eggs?

After an initial sense of smugness at my own supply of eggs being just at the bottom of the garden, thoughts turned to how frustrating it must be to be a farmer right now.



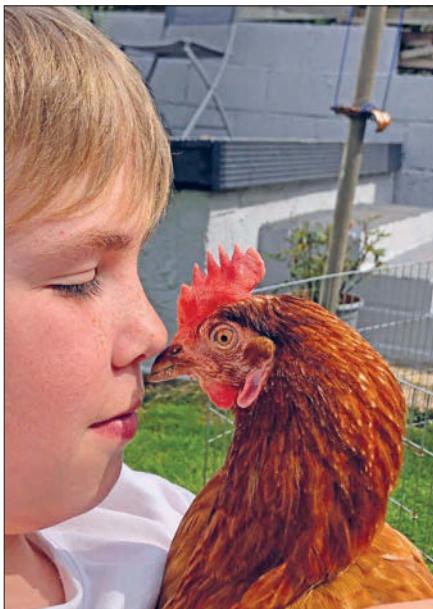
Sales of eggs into the food service sector have plummeted as eating establishments closed



Eggs: large, small, brown, speckled or white – all taste delicious!

their doors the minute lockdown landed – bad news for restauranteurs and such like, but this did at least allow extra eggs to flow into the retail sector where supermarkets were losing the battle in keeping shelves stocked. And that was surely good news, right? Well it would have been if only it was that simple, however eggs sold into the food service sector are delivered in large stacks of trays, not ideal for a supermarket shelf where we're used to buying in boxes safely snuggling 6's and 12's. As fast as demand grew for eggs, so did egg packaging become scarce and that compounded supply problems meaning as we learnt to switch from eating out to eating in, we lacked one of the most basic food commodities to bring out our inner Jamie Oliver.

Sales of eggs have increased by 2 million per week at Sainsbury's alone, and you can bet on other supermarkets facing the same predicament forcing some to look abroad for a top up to supply chains. Lidl now sources dutch barn eggs, having ditched the British Lion egg in March - a move very unpopular with UK farmers who immediately appealed to the retail sector to think innovatively. What about wonky veg and what must surely be the natural progression to think non-uniform eggs; if only supermarkets realised what an additional delight it could be to open a box of eggs of different size, speckle and shell colour. Note to supermarkets: please revise your outdated



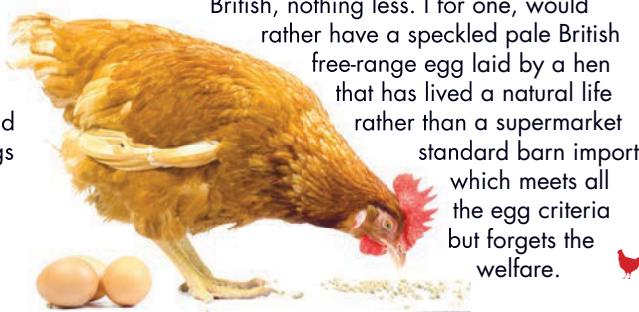
Young BHWT supporter, Darragh, and his favourite pet hen, Joan, enjoying a cuddle

self-imposed regulations, you give the consumer no benefit and do the farmer no favour. Until Covid19 'small' eggs or 'seconds' which might be classified as such simply because the colour of the shell wasn't quite right were sold into the processed food sector, but now's the time to be brave, try out the British consumer ... see how adverse, or not, they are to eggs being ever so slightly different. And anyway who determines what's 'right' in the supermarket board room – he or she clearly doesn't keep chickens!

Tesco took the bold step at the end of May to go where no supermarket has gone for 40 years, in selling white eggs again (apart from a few which sell at Christmas under the saccharine guise of 'snow eggs') which went out of fashion in the 80's when brown eggs were deemed healthier for the nation. Another example of total marketing poppycock of course.

What happens next?

In terms of hens finding homes, the charity is well placed with PPE equipment and caring, keen volunteers to start rehoming work soon. Hurrah. The industry will continue to find its way through the mire, and the best way we can support them is to insist on British, nothing less. I for one, would rather have a speckled pale British free-range egg laid by a hen that has lived a natural life rather than a supermarket standard barn import which meets all the egg criteria but forgets the welfare.



About the BHWT

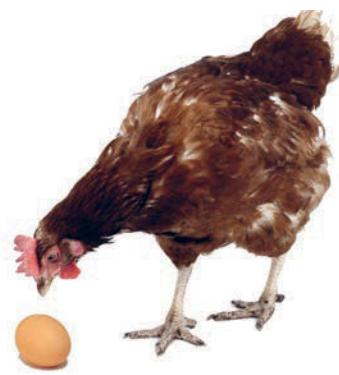


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- We take hens at the end of their commercial laying life from farmers around the UK all of whom support our work.
- We lobby MPs and MEPs to support British farmers and protect them from cheap imports where we have no control over welfare.
- We've developed an education programme to teach a new generation of hen keepers about animal welfare, and where their food comes from.



www.bhwt.org.uk

Feeling cooped up, is it time to get your coop up?

Lisa Mancell, National Coordinator from Farmgate Feeds, gives her expert advice on how to get started keeping chickens.

Like me, has this lockdown got you thinking about how you can make the most from your home and space? For those of us who keep chickens, we have never felt so privileged to care for them and enjoy the simple luxury of collecting eggs in the morning. As we're spending so much time at home with the same people, our animals help maintain a daily structure and all-important headspace. After many years of weighing up the pros and cons, prospective hen owners may be feeling like they are ready to pluck up the courage. If that's the case, then here are the first steps you should consider helping you on your way to becoming a happy hen owner.

Flock size

Hens are very social creatures so think about your numbers but try not to run before you can walk! Three is a good number to start with and then build up your flock gradually. Always introduce two new hens together as one will get bullied on its own.

Space to roam

Buying a cutesy hutch can be tempting but make sure you have the space for them to roam free too. A space of 10m² is ideal for a flock of five. Perches should be removable for easy cleaning and ventilation holes must be provided (well above the height of roosting chickens).

Protection from predators

Foxes are very cunning and make it their mission to outwit us! The best defence is keeping to a regular bedtime for your chickens and make sure that they are all safely roosting before you lock the hutch.

Don't rely on chicken wire – it's great for keeping chickens in but not so good at keeping predators out. Hardware mesh buried at least two feet deep will stop predators from digging their way



into your chicken run. You can also try increasing visibility and cutting down any long grass or areas of cover around your chicken enclosure, this will make those less-confident predators vulnerable to being spotted.

Nutritious feed – do your research

If you are keeping hens for eggs, then investing in the best quality feed is really important. With laying hens, a layer pellet or mash should be fed from up to four weeks before the onset of laying. Make sure the balance is right between protein and fibre – which is important to keep your hens full and provide good bacteria in the gut. Also consider the size of your chickens, as smaller hens and bantams will require a short-cut pellet to aid their digestion.

Farmgate Layers Pellets and Mash are our two flagship diets within the Farmgate range, both containing all the calcium they need, so there is no additional requirement for ingredients such as oystershell or limestone grit – unless you wish to give a little occasionally to satisfy their curiosity and instinct.

We also have Farmgate Super Omega Mash, a uniquely manufactured product containing LINTEC – an extruded linseed product rich in omega 3 oil. All our diets are fully balanced and contain the same optimum levels of calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D3 that are required for shell quality, bone strength, consistent yolk colouring along with 'egg'cellent egg production and size!

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing your flock running towards you as you carry their nutritious breakfast.

Hens are for life, not just lockdown!
Chickens do take a lot of work so make sure that you will have the time for them once life gets back on track too. They need daily feeding and water, a clean coop, protection from predators and lots of general care like all our animals.

Once you are all set up and enjoying being a new hen-keeper, you will quickly reap the rewards and fall in love with your chickens. Creating a home for your new chickens will be something you can continue to enjoy with your family and holding a freshly laid egg, still warm from its bed of straw really is nature's perfect takeaway.

For guidance on getting started with your hens and advice on the best feeds to support their nutrition, visit our website www.farmgatefeeds.co.uk or contact the Farmgate Feeds team. Their wealth of knowledge and expertise will support you on all aspects on poultry nutrition and welfare.

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My small town gardening life

Donna Smeed believes that smallholding can be for all!

Gardening is my joy and salvation! I know, I know, you hear this a lot, but only because it's true! The first gardening experience I can remember was posing amongst the peonies and adoringly following my grandmother around, who was doing a little of something to this plant, a little of something else to that one. I was helping by picking the odd flower and handing it to my grandmother, thinking she would be so pleased. She made out like she was but, as I became more involved, I realised that once it was picked it was a dead flower. Staying with my grandmother was a little oasis in the chaos of family life in a large

and expanding family. I must have been about three years old, maybe a little younger.

I progressed to pulling up weeds for tuppence a pound for my mum. I am pretty sure my cheekiness at putting the odd stone in the bucket didn't really go unnoticed. It was a never-ending job but, even then, there was a huge satisfaction in seeing the lovely milk chocolate soil between the flowering plants and a peace and quiet that was often difficult to find at home. I don't remember my mum growing vegetables but we had plenty of runner beans from other people's glut of produce. What I do remember, the names of the plants she grew.

In my productive garden

Our garden is 15 meters long and ten wide. Half of the garden is given over to the chickens, though we are pinching a bit to make a lean-to greenhouse. At the moment we have a variety of six hens and one cock. They live in chickie luxury under the apple and pear trees – they often roost in them and I have to sometimes climb a ladder to fetch them down and put them in their coop at night. We have one two metres by one metre raised bed which will probably go once we have the greenhouse up. At the moment we have raspberries, cucumbers and green veg in it. We have a little courtyard area with walled





planting areas built in, perfect to absorb the warmth of the day. I have made a strawberry bed on there with cucamelons climbing up the wall behind. On top of the wall that separates the courtyard from the main garden I have various deep window-box planters with small crops such as, this year, spring onions, radishes, salads, and sprouting beans for planting out. It is a handy place to grow salad as it is easy to see if there are any sneaky snails sliding around. The trouble with growing things in pots is having to water them carefully, and

I don't find "careful" very easy. They need a little water but very often.

I have been busy painting walls in the little courtyard part of our garden to make it more light. Though now I think I should have painted everything black to absorb more heat. I really hope we have another summer this year - if spring is the only summer we have I will be really disappointed. I have never, ever, had to water my veg as much as I did during the first months of lock-down. Luckily we own two huge water butts and that has helped a lot.

Our garden is not large by any means but nothing has brought home to me how very lucky we are to have one than the arrival of Covid-19. My very best friend lives in a flat and is desperate to move to a place with a garden. She doesn't even have a balcony but she has been really successful growing tomatoes in her living room. So I get a panic call "my tomatoes are nearly reaching the ceiling". I really wish I had that problem this year! If Angela can do it, anyone can do it. Angela calls beautiful rich compost "dirt" and never remembers what the plants are called.

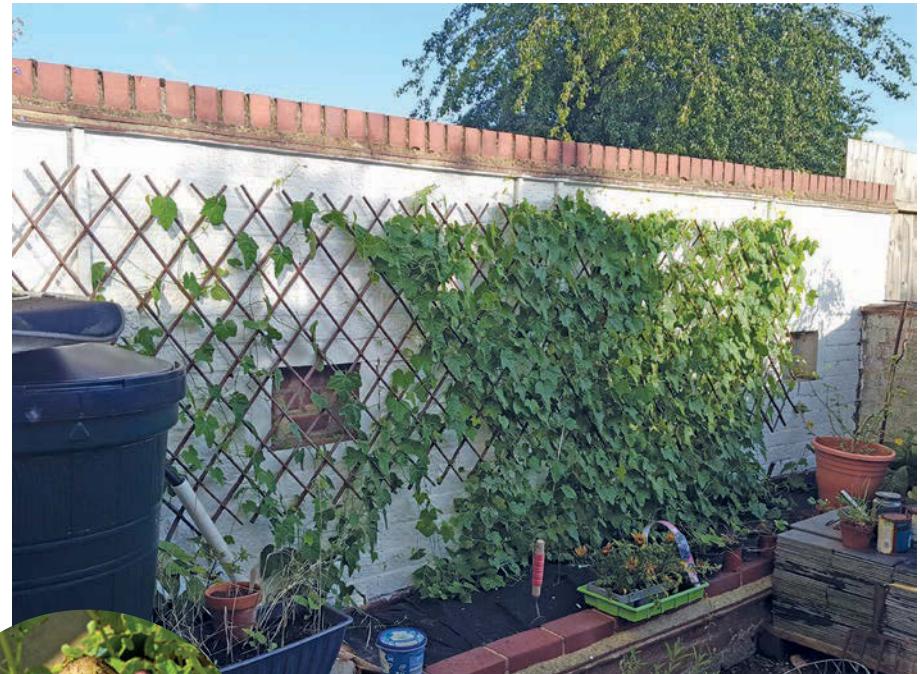
Treading on egg shells – discourage slugs and snails

The rainy week arrived and that found me egg-shelling everywhere to counter the slugs and snails which were about more. The chickens come out every day and make quite a good job, then I go



out with my torch at night to try and hold back the tide of marauding gastropods. I find them chomping their way through my strawberries, beans and radishes like a bunch of food critics on Masterchef. Uncontrolled they eat a bit of this and a bit of that until everything has holes in. The cat helps a lot but the dog just looks on bemused by the whole show. (The chickens peer at me through the chicken run chortling away).

I have managed to get some tomatillo seedlings going, generously donated. The asparagus pea seeds that came with them haven't made a show at all yet. I love to try unusual things, last year I tried growing cucamelons for the first time. We had an amazing crop of unusual tasting, cucumbery-limey tasting grape-sized delights. I have a good window-box full of salad plants and I am told, by



an absolute expert in the eating field (a very good friend), the radishes have just the right amount of pepperiness but sweet and milky. Personally, I don't eat them but my main man loves them. I had to wait for my garlics to finish growing before I could put the Purple Sprouting Broccoli and Brussels Sprout sprouts in their place with the rest of my cucumber plants behind. I have grown some cauliflowers as well but I have never had much success with them. In my very first garden of my very own (a proud moment) I grew some pathetic looking greyish things, they looked a bit like those anatomical pictures of brains. Still, I persist. Last year the death of my cauliflower seedlings contributed magnificently to the productivity of my broccoli sprouts, the snails ate the cauliflower but never made it as far as the broccoli before I was out there with my trusty torch.

Despite my fails, I wouldn't rather be doing anything else. I love growing a bit of everything. The first potatoes of the year have been pulled up and we have curry for dinner today. What could be better! **TS**

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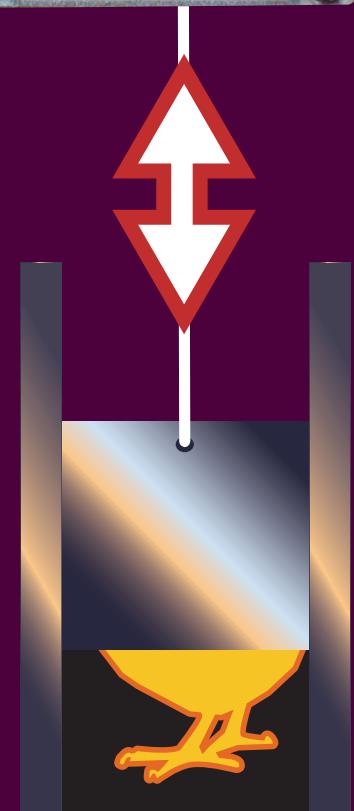
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DONKEYS do HAYMAKING

Lorna Shannon demonstrates how donkeys have played their part in agriculture

The dramatic Norman keep of Trim Castle provided the backdrop to the annual Trim Haymaking Festival in June and the Donkey Breed Society of Northern Ireland provided the foreground.

The Festival is staged every year on the third Sunday in June and is a celebration of a traditional way of life. Attractions on the field included steam and vintage tractors, a scything competition and even a roll in the hay! The DBS(NI) were invited to add their particular skills to the mix.

Despite recent wet weather, the day dawned dry and warm. An area of the field had already been mown and first on to the grass were Ashley and William Brown with Lady pulling a wonderful old hay kicker. Lady is now retired from the show ring but she is still very active and demonstrates the versatility of the donkey. The hay kicker dates from the early 1900's and is owned by the Brown family. This implement mechanically tosses the hay to help with the drying process. As with much of this type of machinery, it was originally made to be horse drawn but as it is superbly balanced, one donkey is easily able to pull it.

On another part of the field Declan Feeney, Anne Brown and Caolan Cochrane were adjusting the harnesses of Camilla and Charlie who were yoked together to pull the reaper. Camilla and Charlie started working together earlier this year and are becoming a reliable team either ploughing or pulling Declan's four-wheeler. The reaper was made for

Ashley Brown and Lady with the hay kicker



a single horse by Pearce of Wexford some 100 years ago but has since been converted for two donkeys. The reaper was shown for many years by Robert Orr but hadn't cut grass for 40 years when Declan bought it.

Declan was joined in the reaping by the only pair of horses to attend this year's festival and although the donkeys were dwarfed by the draught horses it was a splendid sight to see the four animals driving across the field together. In short order the grass was cut and a cheer went up as the last pass was made.

With the hay shaken out it was time for the field workers to arrive with grapes and carts to lift the hay and start to build the stooks. Anne McHenry led the way with Blossom pulling her liveried flat van. The van was painted to represent a greengrocer's vehicle by the late Mr Gordon Colhoun of Sion Mills and Ann has had many successes with the vehicle

in traditional classes at the shows this year.

Junior members pull their weight

10 year old twins Adam and Tristan Brown were driving another flat van pulled by their donkey Harry. This small flat van is beautifully proportioned and suits Harry and the boys perfectly. Harry has been a part of the Brown family for many years and even attended Ashley and William's wedding. He demonstrates how valuable a donkey can be in bringing junior members into the Society.

Another junior member, Carragh Cochrane was driving a stiff cart from the traditional standing position and this was loaded for her by Sinead Doran. The stiff cart was only built 40 years ago but is a faithful reproduction of the type of vehicle that would have been found on farms all over Ireland up until the middle of the 20th century. Another method used for transport around the farms was the creel. Two of these baskets were hung from a wooden cruck on the donkeys back. Local mother and daughter team Caroline and Rebecca Giles-Lee demonstrated the use of creels with two of their donkeys.

There were plenty of hands willing to rake and throw the hay onto the different vehicles from where it was offloaded and expertly shaped into stooks by James McHenry and Peter Short. The hay was gathered and stacked just in time, as the sky darkened and a light rain began to fall.

The DBS(NI) would like to thank the organisers for extending the invitation and for supplying the much needed tea and wheaten at the end of a successful day.



Declan Feeney, Camilla and Charlie with the reaper

Carragh and Barney with a full load



Carragh Cochrane and Barney with the stiff cart



Donkeys and horses working the field together



Ann McHenry and Blossom with the flat van



The last pass



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Practical and useful webinars in donkey behaviour and working donkeys
<https://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/knowledge-and-advice/webinars>

The Donkey Breed Society provides useful advice sheets on long reining and driving plus awards for their members and an on line shop with books on driving donkeys.
www.donkeybreedsociety.co.uk

<https://www.equidpower.org/> the Equid Power Network is a coalition created by:

• **European Draught Horse Federation** • **The Donkey Sanctuary** • **World Horse Welfare** with the aim to highlight the benefits of working equids by promoting their responsible use and care, recognizing them as a valid, affordable, clean and renewable power source, as well as their value in human livelihoods through their contribution to financial, ecological and social capital. Irish Ploughing Championships - normally in September but obviously look at their website for this year <https://www.npa.ie/>



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The word is spreading about mini round balers. Many small farmers are finding that they are the best choice for getting their hay in the barn. The mini round baler works on the same principle as its bigger cousin, rolling the hay inside a chamber until it reaches a certain size and then wrapping the bale with twine and ejecting it out the rear of the machine.

The size of a mini round bale is roughly the same as the small square bales, they generally weigh 15-25 kilos. Bales of this size are perfect for feeding smaller livestock like goats and sheep, ensuring little to no waste. Even though they are round, the bales are easy to stack, and the spaces left between allow

for ventilation between bales once in the barn.

The Siromer 'mini-baler' has three density settings allowing the user to manage what weight of bale is preferred.

Drum Mower

To make hay the grass is ideally cut with a drum mower. The standard drum mower has two counter-rotating drums that are powered from a gearbox above. Each drum is essentially a cylinder with a large disc attached to the bottom. Depending on the model, either 3 or 4 free-swinging blades are attached to each of these discs. When in operation, the entire drum/disc/blade assembly rotates. This heavy rotating mass creates a great deal of momentum, which helps to power the mower through thick spots in the field.

As a drum mower moves through the field, the drums are rotating toward each other, which causes the cut crop to pass between the drums and be dropped in a windrow behind the mower. This windrowing effect eventually must be spread back out with a tedder or rake in order for the hay to dry properly.



Hay Rake

Ideally, buying a hay rake which can turn the grass and row it up is more economical than buying two machines. It is important that the rows are not too wide or too high for the baler. Too wide and the baler will miss collecting some of the grass, too high and the baler will keep clogging up. The rake you buy will need to match the balers requirements. The Siromer single rota rake will turn your grass and rake it into rows to match the mini-balers performance.

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Herbs on the Smallholding

Drew Spellar, Chair of The Herb Society, looks at ways to extend the season



Collecting Rosemary



Trimming lavender

Getting the most out of your herbs for as long as possible...

Anyone with an interest in growing their own, or a garden that they like to lose themselves in, will know the contrast between the sleepiness of the plot in Winter and the frenzy of activity in the height of Summer. The jobs seem endless – as often do the gluts of courgettes and runner beans. We start to take stock of what has worked well and make notes (hopefully that we can find next year) of the things to repeat and those not to. I grow and sell herbs locally, so I am normally also trying to ensure that I have enough plants to keep my stall well stocked, although this year has given me the opportunity to try a few new things.

As we come towards the end of the

main herb growing season in most of the UK, the plants that we have been growing are looking at their best. Many of them will be in flower – or already have flowered – and whilst the activity of peak season may be behind us there are still plenty of useful jobs that we can be doing to get the most from our herbs for the rest of this year and into next.

My top three ways that you can do to make your herbs work for their money are to keep them growing, propagate from them and harvest from them for later use. Not only will this give you more from each plant, but it will also encourage them to become stronger and more productive plants later.



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ABOUT US

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- Provide information, knowledge and news on all aspects of herbs; medicinal, culinary, growing and more
- Bring together all those with an interest in herbs, from the amateur to the professional; UK and beyond
- Increase the understanding and use of herbs for health and well-being
- Provide a worldwide forum for the exchange of ideas and information about herbs and their many uses



WWW.HERBSOCIETY.ORG.UK



Dill seed

Keep them Going

Most of our seed sowing is normally done early in the year to ensure that our young plants can establish and get the most from the longer, warmer summer months to flourish. However, there are still herbs that you can sow now to enjoy this year as long as you continue sowing. Fast-growing herbs such as dill or coriander will still give you a crop this year or you could try any of the herbs in the same family such as chervil.

If you have some space to sow indoors, even if that is a windowsill, then there is no reason why you can't continue to sow and grow herbs such as basil, parsley, chives, and mint to name a few. You also have the option to take some of the plants you have been growing outside into the house or a greenhouse. If you look after them properly, there is no reason not to enjoy some herbs year-round.

Now is also a good point to think about sowing for next year. Poppies and calendula (English marigold) will both overwinter well and give you flowers earlier next Spring. It might take a bit of forward planning but as the season slows, we have a chance to think about next year.

Making new plants

There are of course several herbs now which are either in flower or about to flower and you don't get seed without flowering. Allowing your herb plants

to flower will bring pollinators to your garden which is great for wildlife. It is also important for your other plants that need insects to do their job of transferring pollen to fertilise. Any herb in flower is a great attraction for pollinating insects but my favourites are thyme, with its many tiny flowers for bees to choose from, and borage which also has the benefit of the flowers tasting fantastic; add the vivid blue star-shaped flowers to cocktails and salads for their fresh cucumber flavour. This is a perfect time to think about harvesting seed from those plants to save for next year.

To harvest the seed, wait until flowering has finished and the seed pods are just turning brown. Different herbs have different sized seed from the tiny dust-like seed of thyme to the perfectly manageable coriander seeds which means that some are easier to collect than others. Collect seeds or seed heads in a paper envelope or bag, label it up and store in a cool, dry container. Trying to time this exactly right can be tricky and some seeds are difficult to collect so you could always try taking cuttings.

You can take cuttings from perennial herbs – mint, lavender, sage and rosemary will all work well. Cut a healthy stem below a leaf shoot and about 10-15cm long. Make any large leaves smaller by cutting with a knife and pinch out the tip. You can then use a hormone powder on the rooting tip if you like.



Borage with bees

Take your prepared cuttings and put them into the edge of a pot of compost - about four to a pot. Cover the pot with a plastic bag and leave in a warm place until it roots.

Save some for later

If you want to dry your herbs, then the best time to harvest them is just before they flower when the flavour is the strongest. Collect stems of healthy-looking fresh herbs in the morning after any dew has passed, gently shake the bunch to remove any small bugs, tie up with string in bunches and hang in a cool, dry room. Harvesting like this at this time of year has two benefits. Firstly, you have a dried reserve of herbs to use over the winter without having to venture outside. Secondly, you are encouraging some fresh growth before the plant becomes dormant making for a stronger, more productive plant next year.

By only harvesting a portion of the plant, say a third at a time, you give the plant a chance to recover. You also have the chance to enjoy the plant fully. There are so many ways to store herbs. You can try various drying techniques using the oven or microwave to speed the process up. Herbs make great butters, oils and vinegars, salts, and sugars for a taste of summer in mid-winter. And as you are sat enjoying your homemade basil oil in a piping hot bowl of tomato soup in November, you can start to plan your herb growing for next year! **TS**



Harvesting Parsley



Herb Butter

Making the most of it

John Sones looks at the use of water on holdings

There are good reasons for smallholders to consider both their use of and how to save water. An unusually hot May has made the ground very dry in many areas. Also the current situation has led to questions about whether we can produce enough of our own food if imported food is restricted. We are fortunate that our mains water supply has not been interrupted despite the pandemic and at the moment a hosepipe ban is unlikely so both we and our crops have been ok so far but neither are absolutely certain.

Water is used for various purposes. For people and animals it must be of a drinkable quality but grey water can for example be used for flushing toilets and natural water for crops. Alternatives to always using 'tap' water mean that both cost, consumption and reliance on this can be reduced and in this article I will consider some other long term sources.

A good start is to ensure that all water pipe/hose joints do not leak and taps do not drip. If your animals are supplied via a trough with a ballcock connected to the mains, is the area around it always wet and the water dirty? It may be that changing the water everyday via watering cans may save wastage and poaching. If you have several water points consider using a bowser.

Perhaps the simplest 'installed' system is the use of a large plastic bottle with the bottom cut off buried upside down near the roots. This will direct any rain



falling to the roots and in dry times any water that you irrigate with. A simple method to collect and store rain water is to install water butts or similar on the gutter downpipes of all your buildings. To increase the capacity, several water butts can be joined together. These can either be bought as a manufactured item or pre-used containers adapted but these must not let light in.

There is also the problem that if there is a hose pipe ban, hoses cannot be used directly off the mains supply. A while ago I installed a 2,400 litre tank to collect rain water from the barn roof in addition to the various water butts that were already in place. This is then pumped to a standpipe. This was a long term investment which gives me a supply which can be used through a hose at any time without restriction. Bear in mind that rain water collected directly is not fit to drink as it will be contaminated from debris and the deposition of particulates on the roof from pollution and cars.

Natural water can also be sourced from the ground but this will depend on there being a suitable location on your land. For a well or bore hole, check first to see if water is available for abstraction in your area and if you require an abstraction licence – see www.gov.uk. If required for drinking, the quality will need to be tested. A starting point may be at or near any existing old wells or hand pumps and local knowledge of the area might also be useful. One source



of information is www.drillyourownwell.com. Whether you do it yourself or use a professional company, things to consider include abstracting slightly higher than the drill depth and preventing debris being pumped up with the water.

If you have more than one outlet e.g. stand pipes, universal couplings will make life easier moving equipment around.

Another method is surface water collection by installing land drains which could also reduce problems moving around in winter. Water can then be directed to a collection point and if the chamber is large enough, it can be stored below ground to be pumped out and used later. Alternatively, a small collection chamber can be used and the water then pumped into an above ground tank for storage. Another option depending upon the lie of the land is to drain the water into a 'natural' pond but this can soak/evaporate away.

Underground pipes should be well below the surface and standpipes lagged to prevent freezing or drained down for winter.

Using natural water not only increases self-sufficiency but can save money long term and is also environmentally friendly. It will be a better quality than the mains for growing and you will also be free of any hosepipe conditions in the event of a drought. **TS**



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HOME CHARCUTERIE

By Paul Thomas

BRESAOLA

An Italian classic, the translucent ruby colour of thinly-cut bresaola with its minimal marbling of fat hints at the intense meaty flavour of the beef that follows. This recipe truly is a celebration of beef; be sure to source the best quality meat that you can find.

One of the most highly regarded traditional cured meats of Italy, the Bresaola della Valtellina was awarded a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in 1996. This bresaola is made in a valley in Lombardy, in the extreme north of Italy and not far from the Swiss border, a region well known for the production of cow's milk cheeses including bitto, a seasonally-made hard cheese which can be aged for many years. There are records of both cheese and cured meats from this area for over 500 years and it is perhaps not surprising that an area renowned for its dairy production should also develop recipes for cured products made from beef.

The recipe is much more widespread these days, with examples of artisanal bresaola being made all over the world. It is a fairly easy recipe to follow, requiring little in the way of specialist equipment. Like coppa, lomo and pancetta, this is made from a larger slab of meat that, unlike salami, is not minced during its production.

The cut of beef which should be used to prepare bresaola is from the top of the hindquarter of the animal. Silverside and topside work very well. In some places, such as the United States, these may form part of a larger cut referred to as the 'round' steak. This is a reasonably lean cut of beef, typically with a good amount of flavour. Because the beef cuts are so lean, they often have a slightly drier mouthfeel than the cured pork products. A very thin strip of meat will tend to become very dry and chewy so choose a good-sized, thick joint that will retain some

tenderness during curing and drying. Trim off any excess fat from around the edges; it is less likely to develop rancidity than pork fat but it is harder and it is unlikely to enhance the mouthfeel of the bresaola.

INGREDIENTS

- Beef topside, silverside or round, 1.5kg/3lb 3oz
- 50ml/2fl oz red wine
- Curing Salt #2, 2.5g/1/16 oz per 1 kg/2.2lb of meat, optional (this must be measured accurately for the exact quantity of meat being used; always follow the manufacturer's instructions)
- 40g/1½oz pure dried vacuum (PDV) salt
- 2.5ml/½ tsp ground black pepper
- 1.5ml/¼ tsp chopped fresh rosemary
- 1.5ml/¼ tsp dried thyme or oregano
- 1.5ml/¼ tsp dried juniper berries, crushed
- 2.5ml/½ tsp ground nutmeg
- Large fibrous or natural salami casing

1 Using a sharp knife, trim any scraps of meat from the outside of the beef as these can become quite tough during curing. Also remove any outer layers of fat. Weigh the trimmed joint of beef and record the weight. You will need this to calculate the quantity of curing salts but also the moisture loss during drying.

2 Place the beef into a plastic zip-lock or vacuum-pack bag and pour in the red wine. Leave it in the refrigerator at 3–5°C/37–41°F overnight. The following day, open the bag and discard the wine.

3 Measure out the curing salt accurately for the exact quantity of meat being used and mix it with the PDV salt. Add the pepper, rosemary, thyme or oregano, juniper berries and nutmeg. Pour the cure ingredients into the bag, coating the meat as evenly as possible.

4 Seal the bag and place it in the refrigerator at 3–5°C/37–41°F for 14 days, turning the beef in the bag every other day to redistribute the cure. After 2 weeks, remove the meat from the bag. It should look darker and will feel firmer. Rinse off the excess cure, and pat dry with kitchen paper.

5 The beef is then packed into a fibrous or large natural casing that is just big enough to hold it and which has been soaked for at least half an hour ahead of stuffing. If it is difficult to fill the casing, rub the outside of the meat with a little olive oil. Working slowly, carefully ease the beef in, squeezing all the air out of the casing. Tie the end with butcher's string. A butcher's net can be tied around

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Paul Thomas

the outside, principally to help to maintain its shape as it dries but it also adds to the visual appeal of the hanging meat.

6 Hang the bresaola to dry in a meat safe or in a cool larder until it loses 35–40% of its weight. This may take several months depending on the size of the cut of beef. The temperature should be maintained steadily at 10–12°C/50–54°F with humidity around 80%. Too low a humidity in the early stages will cause the outside of the meat to harden, preventing the core from drying properly.

TO SERVE

Cut off the netting and score the casing with a sharp knife, peeling it back as far as you intend to slice. Slice very finely either with a carving knife or a meat slicer. The cut face should be protected with a strip of clingfilm or food wrap to prevent it from drying out. If several days pass since the bresaola was last carved, discard the first slice which is likely to have dried out. Wrap the remaining bresaola in greaseproof paper to prevent it from drying out and to protect the surface from contamination.

SPICE MIXTURES

The spice mixture can also be enhanced with ¼ teaspoon of star anise seeds which, while not traditional, marries beautifully with the flavour of beef. Do not be afraid to experiment with your own unique spice mixture, but keep a note of it; discovering the perfect blend can lead to frustration if you cannot later recall the spices used. **TS**



Paul Thomas describes making your own charcuterie as an almost magical process. His new book is an accessible, expert guide to the age-old craft of preparing meat and fish products by home curing, salting and drying. Published by Lorenz Books, 9780754833253, price £20.

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Official Breed Club for Oxford Sandy & Black Pigs

The Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Society was formed in 1985 by a small group of dedicated breeders including Andrew Sheppen and Steven Timmins. The Society is responsible for saving the breed from extinction. The Society continues to promote and conserve the breed, sharing information, advising would be buyers and members, particularly in relation to maintaining the quality of the breed. The Society also helps members sell birth notified and registered stock.

The current Society Committee has a wealth of breeding experience and is comprised of:



Jane Mathews - Jane has been Chair of the Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Society since 2015, and is also the first Lady Chair of the British Pig Association in its 130 year history as well as being a Breed Representative for the breed. Having grown up on a farm, Jane is an experienced breeder, keeping and breeding Oxford Sandy and Black Pigs at her farm in North Wales. She has recently set up a farm shop selling only produce from the farm and is passionate about promotion of the wonderful pork the breed produces.



Susan Tanner - Susan is Secretary of the Society, a role she took on in 2015. Susan has bred OSB for many years at her farm in Somerset and works hard to promote the work of the Society attending many events along with other Committee members to promote the breed. Field to Fork events for schools are something Susan is passionate about.



Pat and Peter Colson - Pat is currently the Vice Chair of the Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Society and Peter is Treasurer. Both have been involved with the Society since 2004 and keep the breed at their farm in Oxfordshire. They are experienced breeders having kept OSB for many years. Peter's grandfather was the last commercial breeder of Oxford Sandy and Black pigs. Peter has recently been appointed to the BPA's affiliated judges list.



Dave and Linda Aldous - Dave and Linda produce the Society Newsletter and breed OSB at their farm in Essex. Dave is also a BPA Breed Rep for the OSB breed.

Kath Blackwell is a longstanding breeder of OSB, having kept the breed for over 75 years. She has been made a lifelong member of the Committee for her dedication to the breed and conservation work over the years.

Jack Blackwell, Josh Farrell, Paul Burton and Tania Whittick are all relatively new appointments to Committee. All are dedicated breeders, keen to encourage those new to the breed and help and support members.

All Committee members are happy to help with enquiries about the breed and can be seen at events throughout the year, including Countryfile Live, many shows (local and county), Field to Fork events and Spring and Winter Fairs.

Visit Oxfordsandypigs.co.uk Twitter: [OxfordSandyBlk](https://twitter.com/OxfordSandyBlk)
Or search Facebook for Oxford Sandy & Black Pig Society / Registered Charity

Rob and Zoes Allotment Diary

How we started a journey from a weed infested plot to a plot full of fresh veg.

We were lucky enough to get our allotment plot at the start of the Easter break 8 years ago. We had been on our local councils waiting list for 18 months, so we were very excited when we got the call to view the plot. We walked to the allotment site to see the plot we had been offered but no one was there to let us pop in so we just looked at it from the alleyway and noted that it wasn't too far from the water trough so decided we would go for it.

I collected the keys to the site the next day and decided I couldn't wait til my husband came home from work to have a look, so went to the site after having lunch with my mum and mother-in-law. They came with me and thought we were absolutely mad. The grass (which we later realised was couch grass) was around 2 foot high, there were so many weeds as well as an old fork that had no handle and a lot of other old rubbish. The plot is around 60ft by 30ft.

First things first

Our first job was to slowly remove as much of the grass and weeds as we could. We started at the front of the plot. It was a slow process but we didn't want to use weed killer as we wanted to be as organic as we could be. We were tempted to hire a rotavator to speed the process up but I am so glad we didn't as we didn't realise the nature of couch grass. It just looks like most grass but it spreads rapidly by rhizomes (underground stems) which if cut and even the smallest bit of root is left in the soil will grow into more couch grass. It is a nightmare grass and to be honest we are still have a battle with it 8 years on although now it is a lot more manageable and each year it is getting easier.

On to veg growing

That first year we just grew a small number of vegetables, namely courgettes, tomatoes, runner beans and climbing french beans while battling the rest of our allotment.

When we weren't planting, watering or weeding I was researching how best to use the large space that we now rented from the council to grow lots of vegetables. I read many books and a re-occurring theme was crop rotation. If you grow a crop in the same place every year there can be a build up of their specific pests and diseases. If you practice



crop rotation then there is a reduced risk of those pests and diseases harming your crops as they are not grown in the same place each year.

I looked at what crops I wanted to grow (bearing in mind we wanted our young family to enjoy eating our produce) and used the growing number of books I was reading to work out what crops should be grouped together based on their needs. I decided upon a four year crop rotation plan as I had divided the plants into four different groups.

Over the years we have discovered what we can and cannot grow at the allotment. We persevered with growing cauliflowers and broccoli for about two years and five years respectively but ultimately they took up a lot of room and we really didn't have much success, although the cabbage white butterfly absolutely loved them. So these were

replaced with other crops that we had a lot more success with e.g. the asparagus and gooseberry plants. As we altered what we grew I realised that we had to be quite flexible regarding where each vegetable was planted. So although I haven't strictly adhered to the crop rotation that I had originally planned, I have continued with the general basis of crop rotation (making sure certain plants do not follow others).

Raised beds or traditional style

As the soil at our plot is heavy clay it can be very wet in the winter but can be like concrete during the summer months. As it is prone to water-logging we decided to make raised beds and pathways between the beds so that we don't walk on and compact the soil. Over the years our plot has progressed and the current plan that we are working to is shown above.

Runner & French Beans

Beans are a fantastic crop to grow and there is a great variety on offer. We grow runner beans, climbing french beans, dwarf french beans and also broadbeans.

Beans are another easy to grow produce at your allotment. We grow the seeds in the greenhouse. For both runner beans and french beans we always use 'Root Trainers' as they encourage the roots to grow straight down, this encourages vigorous strong roots and avoids root balls.

We do successional sowing so that we do not get all the beans ripening at the same time and it prolongs the harvest. We sow our first batch and then two weeks later we sow a second batch and again a third two weeks after that.

Always harden the plants off before



planting out. Initially I harden the plants off during the day only (in a sunny position) but when it is nearly time to plant them out, I leave them out during the night too, assuming that a frost is not expected that evening.

When we plant out the first batch of beans we also place two seeds between each plant, again this will prolong the harvest (we only expect one of the beans to be fruitful as the other may not germinate or may be eaten).

Beans are best harvested when they are young before they have the chance to become stringy.



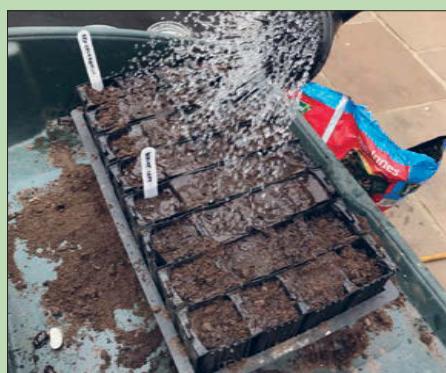
1 First place soil in the root trainers (or your chosen pots). Make sure that there are no airpockets by either tapping the pots down onto a firm surface or by pushing the soil down with your hands/fingers.



2 Now push the runner bean or french bean seeds into the soil. **ALWAYS** remember to label your pots.



3 Sieve or rub soil together over the seeds so that the seeds are covered and there is the same amount of soil on top of the seeds as the size of the seeds.



4 Water the soil, if there were still any air pockets in the soil the water should find them and the pull the soil down, so it may be necessary to put a bit more soil over the pots.

5 About 2 weeks after sowing the beans should look like these. Around this time I sow another batch of seeds so that there will be a successional harvest later in the year.



6 Runner and climbing french beans need a strong support when growing, as they grow very tall. Always wind the stems in an anti-clockwise direction around a cane or whatever support your beans are climbing up.

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Goodbye to Summer

Let's face it, the natural world is in grave danger. Gardens are covered in concrete leading to less flowers and vegetables being grown, massive engineering projects destroying vast tracts of farmland and ancient forest, and crops being sprayed routinely with pesticides. Plus, severe weather events causing drought conditions followed by flooding is having a disastrous effect on the insect population which is a main food source for most small birds. Added to this the millions of migratory birds which being netted en-route to their nesting grounds, and sold for food. This trade is on the increase assisted by the availability of cheap Chinese mist nets. The Chinese also eat certain birds' nests believing them to be an aphrodisiac. The birds return to their old nests and when they find them destroyed they have to start from scratch, wasting valuable time which can lead to only one brood being successfully reared. A combination of these and other factors has had a devastating impact on small bird numbers, especially those that migrate each year, including the Swift. A beautiful, unique little bird whose recent decline by over 50% has been driven by all of the above plus human intervention into their historic nesting places, including restoration of buildings. Swifts spend their entire adult lives on the wing, they are the fastest bird in a straight line on the planet, able to reach speeds of 70 mph, they never touch the ground unless they are injured, and they live for an average of 5-7 years which is a good age for a small bird. The oldest known swift was one found 16 years after it was ringed, making it about 18 years old. When you consider the tremendous effort required to fly the massive distances to and from their breeding grounds, approximately 4 million miles over its lifetime, and the hostile weather conditions they have to battle, this is remarkable. They also carry a parasite which is totally unique to them



Keep it Swift - with the summer visitors about to make the way home, Mary Watson explores their lives.



and has developed while they evolved independently over millennia. This piece by G.J.Gamble is essential reading for anyone who wants to learn about the Swift - www.gjgamble.wordpress.com/2017/06/04/the-greatest-bird-on-earth

What can I do to help?

One of the best ways to help Swifts to survive in an ever more hostile world is by providing them with nest boxes which can be obtained through the RSPB. Before humans and buildings, Swifts nested in caves, hillsides and holes in trees, but over the centuries they have become programmed to use buildings. Unfortunately, our building styles have evolved quicker than the Swifts can adapt and this has resulted in their choice of nesting places being severely limited. Use the following link for helpful information - www.actionforswifts.blogspot.com When they have left gives you several months to make some of these and put them up for next Spring.

Lose the spikes

Ask your local Council to ensure that developers include nesting sites on all new buildings, and ask them to ban spikes being erected to prevent birds entering their nests, as birds determined to access their nests become impaled.

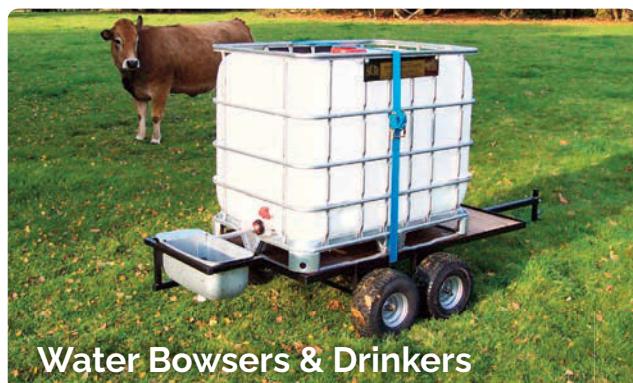
A lot of garden centres use various methods to prevent birds from nesting in and around their property, but in doing so they are causing their numbers to drop even further. Sadly, sometimes the practices involved cause suffering and death to the birds desperate to gain entry to incubate eggs and rear their young. One particular place has erected a massive plastic cover over the outdoor space to prevent this, but birds are still managing to get in and sadly, during the summer the area will heat up to such a degree that sitting birds will die from heat exhaustion. Because of Covid-19 Lockdown the necessary welfare checks have become impossible. If you notice anything you're not happy about, please report it so it can be investigated.

Please spread the word

If you find an injured Swift handle it as little as possible and take it to the nearest bird sanctuary. If it is a fledgling you can help it gain height, but do not throw it from a tall building. Simply let it sit on your palm and stretch out your arm, gently moving it around so it feels the air moving. If it is well it should be able to take off, if not it needs help. Please do everything you can to help to promote the plight of the Swift while we can still make a difference to the survival of these special little birds. Contact Cally at hunllyswiftgroup.com@gmail.com for local and general UK. information, including the use of netting to prevent birds using their nests. Under normal circumstances Cally conducts Swift counts and tours of nesting places in Aberdeenshire, and these will be resuming as soon as circumstances allow. The following link is the live web cam in the Oxford Museum showing Swifts nesting. An absolute must! <https://www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk/swifts-diary> or <https://www.gmit.ie/mayo/swifts> **TS**



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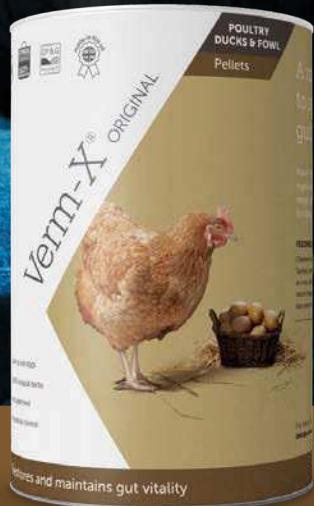


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